

THE DIVINE ARTIST

SERMONS OF CONSOLATION

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THE DIVINE ARTIST

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Sermons of Consolation

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BY

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THE DIVINE ARTIST

By REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D.

THE DIVINE ARTIST

"Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands."—
JOB xiv. 15.

IN the humblest workman there is more or less of the true artistic instinct. When this instinct has free scope, and is not warped or hindered by sordid passions and prejudices, it seeks full expression of itself in the material in which it is working. There is no right-thinking man who values his wages more than his work, or carries out what he merely does as an hireling, because he is paid for it. He regards his work as a moral discipline, doing good to himself and to the world, calling forth his powers into lively exercise, and giving him the satisfaction which necessarily arises from the overcoming of difficulties. He takes pride in his work. He labours diligently at it until it is finished.

When an artist begins his work he sees the end from the beginning; and it is this completion of it that stimulates him to undertake it. The whole finished work lies as a fair ideal before his mind, and he cannot be satisfied until he has realised it in outward shape. He would never begin his work at

all did he not in the first touch see the last; and the nearer he comes to the completion of his work, the greater is his enthusiasm. Michael Angelo, we are told, when a statue was nearly finished, made the marble fly before his chisel with an inspired fury; and it seemed as if he were impatient of every obstacle that stood in his way, in releasing the hidden ideal imprisoned in the block of stone. And so with the painter: as his canvas becomes covered with the shapes of loveliness which his imagination has created, his interest in his work deepens, and his pencil seems more and more animated with his ardent zeal. We read of poets and historians and musicians, who, when the inspiration of some grand work came upon them, shut themselves out from the world for days and weeks, caring for no outward recreation, scarcely taking time to eat or drink or sleep, wrapt up entirely in their work, and filled with a glowing passion which lifted them above all other considerations, until the completion of their absorbing task left them in a state of utter collapse of mind and body. In every department of work, from the highest to the lowest, the genuine workman has this artistic instinct, this overmastering desire to have his work finished in the best way, and made as perfect as he can make it. He has a desire to the work of his hands. He respects himself, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, to whom God has given the power to

mould the materials of the world to his own purposes; and he respects his work as of value as a contribution to the comfort and progress of the world.

We may surely reason from the creature to the Creator. If man has this instinct, He who breathed it into his soul with the breath of primordial life when man was created, must Himself have it in its highest form. It is indeed part of man's likeness to the Divine Image, that he should wish to imitate the methods and perfections of God as he sees them in the works of nature around him. This is what the text assures us of. It tells us that God is the Master-Workman, and that He, like all true human workers, has a desire to the work of His hands. The first chapter of the Bible reveals to us this characteristic of the Almighty. It shows Him to us as profoundly interested in His work of creation, as going on with it day after day unweariedly, unfolding more and more of the fulness and beauty of His plan, until on the seventh day He finished it, and rested, and, surveying all that He had made, He saw that it was very good. He regarded the completion of His work with the satisfaction which a consummate artist finds in the exercise and achievements of his genius. He who fainteth not, neither is weary, rested not because He was tired in or of His work, or because He had exhausted His power and skill, but because He had realised His conception and intention, and found the result to be very good, and experienced a

perfect joy in His perfect creation. Indeed, only God can view with perfect satisfaction the completion of the work of His hand to which He has a desire. For however desirous of perfecting his work, man invariably feels when it is finished how far short it has come of his own conception, and is filled with a sense of failure and disappointment even when his fellow-men are loudest in their praise of his achievement. It is recorded of Thorwaldsen, that when he finished his wonderfully beautiful statue of Hope he was overwhelmed with melancholy ; and, when asked the reason, he touchingly replied, "My genius is decaying, for this is the first of my works that I have been satisfied with. Hitherto my idea has been far beyond what I could execute. But it is no longer so ; I shall never have a great idea again."

To this desire of God to the work of His hands in creation the investigations of modern science have given a marvellous significance. Geology has vastly expanded the majestic series of Divine acts by which the earth was prepared to be the abode of man. Not for six days, but for untold ages, did God carry out with steadfast, unswerving perseverance the work of His hands. The slowness of the creation-process, indeed, is such as to awaken our profoundest awe. With God a thousand years are but as one day. With Him there is no parallax, no variable-ness or shadow of turning ; and, sitting on His

eternal throne, He brought all things into existence in the majestic leisureliness of unbounded power. Look only at a single period of the history of our earth—the period of the deposition of the coalfields. For ages past reckoning, vast forests of old-world vegetation grew and faded and were renewed, and their remains, by slow pulsations of the earth, were deposited as strata beneath the rocks, and there transformed into mineral fuel, and subsequently heaved up by subterranean fires near the surface and made accessible. For ages more this fuel remained hid in the bowels of the earth, while later stages of the creative work were going on; until, at long last, man was ushered upon the scene, and he reached a point in his progress when that fuel required to be dug up, to feed the great industries of the dense and civilised populations of the earth. In the preparation and storing up of coal we see the most ancient of prophecies regarding the coming of a being who, by means of that fuel, was to subdue the earth—a prophecy reiterated when man was created, and which, now, after the lapse of thousands of years, is in process of fulfilment before our eyes. Think of that Divine work executed not after the hasty, capricious, feverish fashion of men, but with the stately march, and the quiet confidence of a mind possessing unfailing resources, and unlimited time, and boundless beneficence, and we shall realise, in the most impressive manner, that God has a

desire to the work of His hands, even though He takes immeasurable ages to finish that work.

We see the desire which God has to the work of His hands in the wonderful perfection with which everything in creation is finished. The atom, which is the smallest known particle of matter, and is at the lowest foundation of visible things, is said by Clerk Maxwell, the celebrated scientist, to be "a manufactured article," having the finger of God clearly seen in its construction. The cell, which is the elementary form of life, is a most complicated object, full of beauty and contrivance. Examine a minute seed, and you will find that it has the most exquisite patterns; or the pollen-dust by which a flower is fertilised, and you will see that it has on it some lovely design different in each species; or the mealy powder on the wings of a moth, and you will find it to consist of the most delicate fairy feathers. How wonderfully is the snowflake formed, and the honey cell of the bee, and the sting of the nettle, and the eye of the insect! There is nothing in nature that is not finished to the highest perfection of which it is capable. God never pauses midway in His operations, as if tired of His work; never abandons anything which He has begun, in capricious desire for something new; never rests and never hastens, until His desire towards His work has been fully accomplished. Everywhere you see the perfection of the utmost minuteness and

detail. Everywhere you see the hall-mark of its Maker impressed upon every object; and it would seem as if God's skill and care were concentrated on the smallest things; the last microscopic atom vanishing from our view with the same Divine glory upon it, as the last star that glimmers out of sight on the remotest verge of space.

But the natural creation is only the pedestal on which God's work of grace is displayed. How marvellously has God shown His desire to the work of His hands in the history of the scheme of salvation! What an overwhelming idea does it give us of the unchangeableness and all-comprehensive intelligence and foreknowledge of God! The work of grace was conceived in eternity, and elaborated throughout all time. The Saviour was foreordained before the foundation of the world; and the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, in the symbolism of its objects and processes. The earth was created to be the theatre of redemption. The condition of things which we see in it was not the accident of sin, but the prearrangement of God. The faithful Creator did not forsake the work of His hands, when the being He had made in His own image, to become holy and blessed in the free service of heaven, fell into sin through the abuse of his freedom. He remained true to His original design. Under the new conditions which sin had produced, God still carried out His righteous and loving plan.

By the methods of redemption a holy and blessed race of beings was to be made in His own likeness. The history of God's Covenant people shows to us, in the most convincing manner, that He did not arbitrarily throw aside as an abortive failure what His hand had begun, but carried it on faithfully and unfalteringly. We see, from the calling of Abraham to the coming of Christ, one steadfast purpose being fulfilled, one supreme design moving on in a line destined from the beginning. Abraham saw the day of our Lord afar off and was glad; and when Jesus on the Cross cried out with His latest breath, "It is finished," that great completion of God's work justified the hope which patriarchs and prophets and godly men of old, who died in the faith, reposed upon the truth of God's promises. And since the coming of Christ, we know that He has a desire to the work of His hands in carrying out and completing all that Jesus began to do and to teach on earth. By His own sure word we know that, whatever else may stand or fall, the ministry of His grace shall not cease. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His work and His words shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. Though for these nineteen Christian centuries He has only received the earnest and the first-fruits of the harvest, there is still a matchless patience and hope in His heart; and He has assured us that He shall yet see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

It is upon God's desire to the work of His hands that our hope of salvation depends. Jesus Christ, in every soul that believes in Him, is the beginning of the new creation of God. And we know that He who is the author is also the finisher of our faith. As the apostle says, "We are confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Christ." He who uttered these inspiring words rested his confidence, not upon man's power of perseverance in goodness, but upon God's faithfulness and unchanging purpose of love. He looked away, from all that could be affected by the varying moods of man, to the wondrous persistency of Divine grace, which would never abandon its own design, or give up the souls it had once saved. And even if we murmur against Him, refuse to enter into sympathy with His purpose; if we, in our dark moods, believe not, and resist His Spirit, we cannot alter His eternal nature. He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself. The husbandman has long patience in watching the growth of the seed he has sown, through winter's storms and summer's heat, till the harvest rewards him. And so God, the great Husbandman of souls, has far greater patience in watching and fostering the seed of eternal life He has planted in our souls, until it has produced the blade and the ear, and the full corn in the ear. He sits patiently day after day beside the furnace of

affliction in which His people are tried, watching the process of purification, until the ore of our nature has become like silver that has been seven times purified, fit to reflect His image and be used in His service. The perseverance of the saints is a blessed truth, assuring us that God has a desire to the work of His hands, and that He will perfect that which concerneth us, and preserve us by His grace and power unto the day of salvation.

But across God's purpose of grace comes the ever-present, ever-perplexing mystery of death. Job asks the old question that has weighed heavily upon all the ages: "If a man die, shall he live again?" Death is an end that seems to make all God's work vain; and man's life seems to be no better than the statue moulded by Michael Angelo in snow, which speedily melted and exhaled into the viewless air. But Job answers his own question in the affirmative, by his knowledge of God's faithfulness to His own purposes. He reasons that if other workmen have a desire to finish and perfect their work, God, the great Master-Worker, must surely have a desire to bring His masterpiece in man to the highest perfection of which it is capable. Having made man, He cannot allow the grave to be the end of his life; for the grave, in such a case, would be the utter ending of His work, while it was yet confessedly unfinished. That is the argument of Job; and while we can discern in it some fear and dubiety, born of

the ages before life and immortality were brought to light in the gospel, we can also recognise in it a jubilant note of gladness, like the dawn of the day-spring from on high illuminating the tomb. It reminds me of an inscription which I saw in the Catacombs of Rome, in which a Christian visitor to the tomb of his dead wife records his fear and hope : "O Sophronia, dear Sophronia, thou mayest live ; thou *shalt* live."

If we apply to the death of man the principle of the text, we see at once that death can be no barrier to the completion of God's work in him. Man is the noblest work of God. It was only when He made man that the work of creation was finished. He could not find rest or complete satisfaction in mere matter, though as glorious as sun, moon, and stars, nor in the life of plant or animal, however beautiful or wonderful. The Divine Spirit could only find rest and satisfaction in another spirit, that could sympathise with Him and understand Him. He could only commune with that which was like Himself. And is this being, after ruling this world for a few short years, seeing God's power and wisdom in but a very small part of God's works and ways, having powers capable of endless expansion, and longings that reach the infinite ; is this being, who, as the poet says—

"Built his fane of fruitless prayer,
And rolled the psalm to wintry skies" ;

is he to perish for ever in the dust? Is it conceivable that the continuity of an existence that can apprehend the same truths that are apprehended by God Himself, can be snapped in a moment, and be as though it had never been? If so, then of all God's creatures man is most miserable. Man's life is indeed a vain show. We cannot but feel, for God has made us so, that if death is to be the end of us, life is not worth living. To many a man and woman it brings a preponderance of suffering, and therefore it were better not to have lived at all; and in the rare cases where happiness and prosperity are exclusively enjoyed, the richer and fuller the life the greater the waste caused by its extinction. If there is nothing to wait for but the inevitable falling of the curtain upon a very unsatisfactory play, as life is to the best of us, then there is no compensation for this daily dying of ours, no recompense or redress for our failures, inequalities, and sacrifices, and "earth is darkness at the core, and dust and ashes all that is."

But we cannot believe this. There is an instinct within us that rebels against it—the instinct of the artist, who cannot bear to leave his work unfinished. God hath set eternity in our hearts, the consciousness of a capacity for a larger and more enduring life than that which we experience here; and God cannot deceive us. "If it were not so, I would have told you"; He has not told us, and therefore

His word is true. We have longings and hopes created within us which were not meant to be unfulfilled, but, on the contrary, to receive their appropriate ends and satisfactions; as our hunger and thirst were created to be appeased by bread and water provided beforehand for them. We have assurances in God's Word that our life on earth has latent within it the power of an endless life. He who dowered us with this spiritual, ethereal intellect, which penetrates more and more into the glory of the Divine, which feels itself ever in contact with the immaterial and the eternal; He who sent His own Son into our nature and life to redeem us from our sin and death, will have a desire to the work of His hands, and so complete our frail earthly life, that we shall become pure as Christ is pure, and perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. Death is but a stage in the process of His working in us. The grave is but the hiding-place of His power, in which He is preparing the mortal to put on immortality. Christ by His resurrection-miracles, and triumphantly by His own resurrection, proved that He who liveth and believeth in Him shall never die. The Apostle Paul saw no barrier of death in the way, when he expressed his firm conviction that the work which God had put His hand to would be performed by Him even unto the coming of Christ. His mystic eye looked beyond the departure of the soul from the body, beyond the changes of the

grave, beyond the mysteries of the unknown intermediate state, and saw in the far future the final completion of the sanctifying work which God had begun on earth. And he knew that, if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in us, He who raised up Christ from the dead shall quicken our mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in us.

On the grave of an Irish poet in the cemetery of Glasnevin, Dublin, I saw carved the touching symbol of a caterpillar, and the words inscribed below it from Dante: "Born to become the angelic butterfly." The poet died young, after a life full of trouble and disappointment, without having achieved the grand promise which he had given; and therefore the symbol and the words were peculiarly appropriate. God has a desire to the work of His hands in the case of the worm; and He carries that worm through all its transformations, until it becomes the beautiful winged insect, and thus perfects its being. Man, like the worm, in this world is in an embryonic condition. He is here only in the first stage of his being. Is his progress to stop here? Shall there be no further transformation for him? Yes; for God has a desire to the work of His hands—in man's case greater than in any other part of His work; for man is the crown and consummation, the glorious flower of the whole creation, opening upward into the light of immortality, for whom everything beneath him seems only as root and stem.

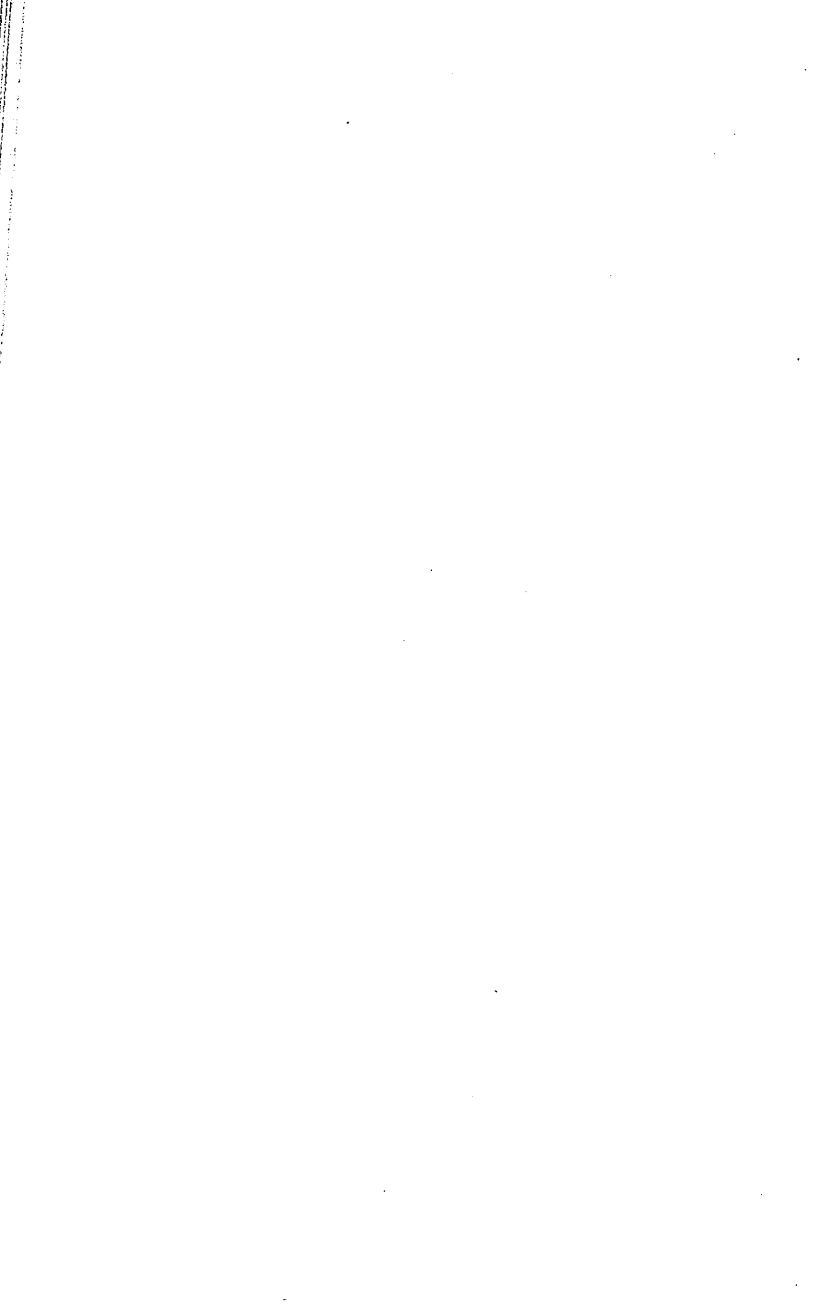
God saw the end of His work from the beginning. In the very act of creating man He was the Omega as well as the Alpha. "Let us make man in our image," that was the present creation of God; after our likeness, that was the future intention of God. The Bible tells us how the first part of God's plan was fulfilled, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him"; but it is not said then "after His *likeness*," for that second part of God's plan was to be carried out gradually throughout human history. Ages had been needed, and shall be needed, to conform man, made in the *image* of God, in every respect to the *likeness* of God; to transform the Divine potentialities of reason and love in him into Divine realities. And death is part of the transformation; for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither shall corruption inherit incorruption." God will perfect us through death. Death is only a transition. The plan of God is one for both worlds. The full flower of the future is hid in the bud of the present; and the reason why there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth, is because all heaven, all eternity, is wrapt up in that repentance. It begins the life eternal, and the blessed change goes on through death, and is perfected in glory.

Because God hath a desire to the work of His hands, He will leave behind no abortive failure, no baffled venture. Each broken pillar in the church-

yard will have put upon it its magnificent capital ; each barren plant that struggled in vain in its inhospitable soil here will be crowned with its bright consummate flower in more genial air ; each crescent of life, removed beyond the shadow of death, will round itself into full-orbed splendour in the bright light above. God's House of many mansions, unlike Aladdin's jewelled palace, will have no unfinished window. The copestone will be put with shouts of rejoicing upon His glorious temple, whose walls have been rising slowly in this world, without noise of axe or hammer. And He whose first act of the new creation was the union of the Divine and human natures in the person of our Redeemer, will make His last act of the new creation the immortal union of the redeemed soul and spirit with the renewed body, fashioned alike unto the glorious body of Christ. And again the eye of God shall look with satisfaction on His new creation, fruit of His travail, reward of His pain and sorrow and death ; and again the benediction shall fall on it as a glory, and rest on it as the seal of perfection for ever.

VICTORY!

By REV. J. H. JOWETT, M.A.



VICTORY!

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."—I COR. xv. 57, 58.

PRAYER

OUR Father God, we would come into Thy presence in the multitude of Thy mercies, and, if we are now inclined to come in the multitude of our murmurings and our complaints, Thou seest how much we need Thee. We pray that Thou wilt now quicken and renew our memories, and, if we are now inclined to forget many things that we ought to remember, may Thy Holy Spirit call them to our remembrance. We pray that we may not be so deeply in the bondage of the immediate as to cease to feel the presence of the eternal, and that we may not be so oppressed by the presence of death as not to feel the glory of the Christian triumph. We pray that the victory that has been singing through the anthem may now possess our spirits, and may we pray to Thee and commune with Thee, not like men and women who

have suffered defeat, but like men and women who are in covenant with the all-triumphant Lord. We pray Thee now to help us to recall the mercy by which Thou hast led us, and we pray that the whole of the merciful past may not be forgotten in what appears to be the calamity of the present. We pray that our immediate distress may not cause us to overlook the miracles and the providences of yesterday. Our Father God, wilt Thou now sanctify our thought that we may have the very mind of Christ, that even while we pray to Thee no subtle unbelief may steal into our prayer, but may our hearts be possessed by the happy confidence which belongs to those who are in league with Christ. Our Father, we bless Thee for the grace by which Thou didst continually refresh our brother and leader whom Thou hast taken home. We thank Thee for the reality and the fruitfulness of his fellowship with Thee; we bless Thee that he knew Thee in the secret place; we thank Thee for the communion in which he found his supreme delight. We bless Thee for the redemptive mercy that found him early, and continued with him until the end. We thank Thee for the many happy hours of conscious companionship with the Spirit which he enjoyed. We thank Thee for the wonderful illuminating power which Thou didst give to him, and for the vision of truth and of glory and of life with which Thou didst feast his own soul; we bless

Thee, our Father, for the great surprises of grace with which Thou didst visit his own spirit, and that from early life until its close Thou didst fill his life with the sense of the fellowship of the Divine. We bless Thee for the sanctity of his home life; we thank Thee for the gracious fellowship which made his home so beautiful; we thank Thee that his house was a sanctuary, and that the communion of wedded life was pervaded by the Divine Spirit. We thank Thee for all the sacred helpfulness he found within his own home, and for the tokens and foretastes of the higher life which he experienced even on earth. We thank Thee for the long and beautiful wedded life never broken, and now for ever again united; we bless Thee that what appeared to be a break was only a break in the flesh, and no change in the spirit, and that death was only an awakening and a passing into the unveiled glory. Here, in this place we bless Thee for what the communion in private and the sanctity of home enabled him to do for his fellow-men. We bless Thee for the messages so faithfully proclaimed; we bless Thee for the fearlessness with which Thy servant delivered the truth; we thank Thee for his own clear insight into his message, for the wonderful power of discernment, and the wonderful gift by which Thou didst enable him to express it. We thank Thee for all the men and women now bowing before Thee, who are nearer Thee because he lived,

and whose lives are hallowed because he ministered ; whose faces are towards the Divine, because of the allurements he brought to bear upon them. We bless Thee for all the many who in glory anticipate his coming, and who are among those to give him welcome. We pray our God, and we pray that our belief may be a happy assurance that the work he did will abide, not only in the hearts of Thy children here, but in countless lives throughout the land and throughout the world. The ministry of his service will remain in chastened aspiration, in holy vow, in reverent vocation, and in hallowed obedience to Christ. And, now, wilt Thou help us to-day. We pray that this may not only be a day of remembrance, but a day of consecration, and may we rob Death of all his spoil by the eager, mightier way in which we shall now surrender ourselves to the living God. We pray that death may have no triumph here ; but may our assurance of Thy presence be so vivid and so real that death shall be swallowed up of life, and our tears shall be wiped away by the spirit of eternal rejoicing. We make our prayer in the name which hallows all prayer — Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen !

SERMON

“Thanks!” “Victory!” Are these words too loud and glaring for the sober services of to-day?

Do they afflict our feelings with the note of discordance? Would it have been better had I avoided this jubilant doxology and sought out a place where the shadows gather, and silence reigns, and lone sorrow sits a-weeping? "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, for Thou didst it." Is this the expression of the temper in which we should wish to abide? "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" Would that subdued wail be the more fitting shrine for our feelings? Is my text too buoyant and triumphant? "Thanks!" "Victory!" It is like the introduction of wedding music into memorial rites. And, indeed, I have chosen the words just because they bring the wedding bells into the circle of shadow and grief.

When I first thought of this morning's service these words immediately laid hold of me, and fascinated me by the warmth and rapture of their triumph. For the words do not express the rapture of the superficial man, or of the thoughtless and the ignorant. They do not proclaim the optimism of the trifler. It is the optimism of an apostle who, more than any other, has surveyed the dimensions of misery and pain, who has peered into the shadow and darkness, and who is familiar with all the destructive presences which harrow and devastate our common life. Take this very chapter in which the wedding bells are ringing. Follow

the thought of the chapter from end to end, and you will find that in the course of its windings it confronts every ominous presence which fills human life with fear. "Law!" "Sin!" "Death!" "The grave!" It defines things at their worst; it gives utterance to our most imperious problems. The many "ifs" with which the chapter abounds express our most burdensome uncertainties and doubts. "If Christ be not risen!" "If the dead rise not!" "If in this life only we have hope!" I say this man is a most fearless questioner. "If!" "If!" "If!" He faces everything, and asks everything its secret; and after all his questionings and experiences his soul is filled with jubilant praise. He is familiar with the midnight; but at midnight he is certain of the dawn. "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." The thought of this chapter moves among the shadows and the fears and the terrors of men, but with ever-lightening step it passes into a joyful wedding march: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Well, my brethren, we cannot get away from the shadows to-day. Despite all voices, the silence is oppressive. Death has been here, and the coffin has only just left the house. The black gap is strange and startling. What shall we talk about? What shall be the tenor of our speech? Shall we move as the victims of defeat and fear? Shall

we pitch our tent by the "ifs," and utter some threnody on the vanity of human life and service? "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust." Shall we gaze into the grave and sob, or shall these flowers, radiant here in the very death and deadness of the winter, lift our thoughts to the warmth and triumph of the ceaseless summer? Shall we sorrow beneath the willows, or rejoice among the palms? I have prayed that my service here this morning may be a ministry to help us in sharing the inspiration of the apostle's triumphant faith and vision. We will not forget the departed, but our remembrance shall not be coloured with the hues of the sunset, but with the glory of the dawn. It shall be a memorial service, but it shall be also a coronation! "Thanks be to God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ." "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now let us see the setting and the apportioning of the apostle's thought. It lays itself out before me under the figure of a spacious landscape, with an ever-increasing river winding through it—a river lit up and shining with a steady and quenchless light. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the all-encompassing gathering-ground. "Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,"—that is the resultant character,

moving along in the varied and beneficent ministry. "Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord,"—that is the beautiful light of certain hope, which makes the river of service shine with radiant inspiration and cheer. I want to turn your minds upon these things, and to lead you first of all to contemplate the great gathering-ground, the abiding secret of a strong and triumphant life.

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory." Victory over what? Let me name the terrific presences again, that we may the better appreciate the quality of the triumph. "Law!" Law is conquered. The moral ideal no longer stands apart, in stern aloofness, an outraged and resentful foe. The law is no longer an unapproachable Sinai, emitting the terrors of thunders and lightnings, but a mount of privileged attainment and communion, covered with the friendly paths of grace. "And a highway shall be there, and a way." The law is no longer a menace, but an allurement. More than a commandment, it is an inspiration and a hope. "Thy statutes have become my songs." This is the victory! "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory." "Sin!" Sin is conquered. How the apostle knows it! With what living vividness he has unveiled the subtleties of sin, and all its guises and horrors. No page is so black as the page where Paul describes the kingdom of

darkness and the appalling bondage of guilt and sin. "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That is the foe! "Where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound." That is the victory! The empire of bondage and night is vanquished, and its servitude exchanged for "the glorious liberty of the children of God." "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory." "Death!" Death is con- 3
quered—death, the grim genius of the shadow, the fellow of loneliness and coldness and abandonment and night! "O death, where is thy sting?" There is something almost of laughing and mocking taunt in the apostle's challenge. He seems to go right up to the awful and terrifying presence, and fling its distress and impotence full in its face. "O death, where is thy sting?" Its destructive ministry is gone. It has lost its sting, its virus, its power to hurt. It is now subdued and harmless as a stingless bee. These are the victories. Law shines with the light of grace. Sin is exiled by the powers of forgiveness. Death is "but a covered way that leadeth unto light." The destructiveness of these things is taken away; "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory."

Now, what is the secret of the victory? It is all enshrined in a familiar little phrase, which is plentifully scattered over all the apostle's letters, and

which is also embosomed in my text. "Through Jesus Christ." That is the abiding secret. From the Lord's death there flows the glorious energy of our victorious life. The reality of our triumph is found in His apparent defeat. Our crown is fashioned at His Cross. That is the apostle's secret, and in the secret he finds the springs of unfailing spiritual delight. Whenever the wanderings of his thought bring him within sight of the Cross, the great logician stays his argument while he sings a triumphant doxology. Here is one of the windings: "It is Christ that died." And here is one of the doxologies: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress . . ."—and so on the majestic music runs! This man finds his music in Calvary's silence, his radiant hope in Calvary's shadow and night. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

"He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to Heaven,
Saved by His precious blood."

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And now, my brethren, I think I have brought your thought to the very springs of Dr. Parker's life and service. At its innermost core there was a reverent suppliant kneeling receptively at the foot

of the Cross. He knew no other resource. The very urgency of his own need kept him near the crucified Christ. It was but rarely that he made quotations, but many, many times throughout his writings you will find these two familiar lines—

“A guilty, poor, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall.”

Now and again, in the profound pain of his own necessity, he wrote and uttered words which recall the poignancy and self-abasement of the earlier pages of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. “Mine has been a poor life, full of sin, red with guilt, marred by daily failures, the morning vow always lost in the evening shame.” And does not this little bit of spiritual autobiography recall to mind the Epistle to the Romans, the palpitating ending of the seventh chapter, so filled with spiritual conflict and unrest: “I feel that I could sin with both hands earnestly, and that few could be mightier in doing evil work; yet I also feel a powerful constraint Christward, as if the Cross could never cease to hold me by an omnipotent fascination.” I say the confession is Pauline, so also is the strong and confident hope. His wrestling continued to the latest day, but so also did the assurance. “Even yet I go astray; I do things that I hate; I neglect duty; I go easily in the wrong direction, and with difficulty in the right. If, then, it will help you to know where I

am, I will tell you—I am at the Cross, crying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”

Brethren, the man in whose own soul the Cross is so unfailing and commanding a constraint will proclaim an evangel from which the Cross is never absent. In Dr. Parker’s ministry the Cross was not a little colouring matter brought in now and again to give a purple patch to his preaching; nor was it a merely pathetic incident, narrated to give persuasiveness to an appeal. The Cross had become to him a method of thought, a temper, a habit of mind; it determined all his thinkings, and formed the pervasive atmosphere through which he contemplated all things. It was as much in evidence when he was interpreting Genesis as when he was expounding John. I open his “Genesis” almost at random, and I find him interpreting an apparently insignificant incident in a patriarch’s life, but the little commonplace leads me up to Calvary’s tree! “I rest on Christ, and go up to His dear Cross and say, ‘If I perish, I will perish here, where no man ever yet did perish.’” The Cross pervaded his ministry because it possessed and fascinated his life. “I should account myself unfaithful and ungrateful if I could write my biography and leave out the very pith and blood of the story.” And what was the pith and blood of the story? “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” The love of his sacrificing Saviour haunted him like a passion!

Two years ago I accompanied him in a drive through one of the loveliest valleys in South Wales. At one point of the journey a small clearance had been made upon the wooded slope, and a naked open scar stared down upon us from the height. To an ordinary observer it was only a big red gash, bleeding there on the lovely hill; but to the preacher at my side, with the passionate evangel in his soul, it at once became a minister of grace. Pointing to the open sore, Dr. Parker quietly and reverently said—

“Hath He marks to lead me to Him,
If He be my Guide.
‘In His hands and feet are wound-prints,
And His side.’”

The word was typical of the hunger of his life. Like Samuel Rutherford, “the port he would be in at was redemption and forgiveness of sin through His blood.” That was his fundamental secret. That was his victory. “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now let us follow the sequence of the apostle's thought. “Victory through Jesus Christ . . . wherefore, be ye stedfast, unmoveable.” That is not the cold link of logic; it is the living bond of spiritual sequence. Let a man abide in the victorious energy of the Cross, and this will be the resultant character; he will be “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding

in the work of the Lord." The one is the issue of the other.

He will be "stedfast." I could have wished that our Revisers had put their marginal word "settled" into the text itself. He will be "settled." It is the opposite to the vagrant-life which sleeps every night on a fresh doorstep. It is the settled life, the life of sweet "at-homeness" and of intimate communions. It is the life of the home-bird, which never cares to be away from the gracious nest! Such is the word which is here employed to express the possible warmth and closeness of our fellowship with the Lord, if only we seek its secrets at the Cross. We are to be at home with the Lord; not roving about in cold and broken relationships. How was it with him whose life we commemorate to-day? He abode near the Cross; did he enjoy this winsome at-homeness with the Lord? What does he say himself? "I have companioned with Him of Nazareth and Calvary in all holiest and tenderest love; love passing the love of women, ardent like an altar flame." That sounds like sweet, settled home-life. An intimacy expressed under the figure of a mutual love which passeth the love of women! And not long ago he wrote this word from Chamonix—written, he said, at a window from which he could see Mont Blanc and the silent fields of ice and snow. "From my earliest recollections I have found supreme delight in prayer—prayer in that large sense which

implies intimate and continuous communion with God. From the beginning until now my highest joy has been in solitary companionship with the Eternal Spirit, my very heart going out after Him with ardent and tender desire." I am not surprised at the rapture. I had suspected it from the prayers I have been permitted to overhear, when he has spoken audibly with his Lord in this place. It is always well to refer to a man's prayers with diffidence and reverence and reserve. It is difficult to speak of them without committing sacrilege. I mention them now as I would mention any other sacred thing. No one can have listened to the prayers which have been offered in this place, without feeling that he who uttered them was very familiar with his Lord. There was about them a calm at-homeness, a sweet communion, which sometimes made them as the speech of a lover with his beloved; and, when communion merged in intercession, one felt as though the rains of God's grace were falling upon the suppliant's spirit, softening it more and more into the gentleness of Jesus, and making it rich in copious sympathies with the manifold needs of men. In his prayers there was room for everybody! His secret meditation must have been sweet, or his public communion would never have been so fragrant with spices from the gardens of the blest. His prayers had the very "mind of Christ," because he himself was "stedfast," settled at home with the Lord.

And what was the issue of this? A man who has discovered the secret strength of victory at the Cross, and who, in the deep places of the Spirit, is at home with the Lord, will also be "unmoveable" before the onslaughts and enticements of the devil. "Unmoveable!" There shall be nothing shifting about him, nothing pliable, nothing yielding, nothing of "the reed shaken with the wind," either before the soft seductive breezes of vanity or before the furious blasts of majestic vice. "Unmoveable!" That is the character of the Lord's intimates. "Behold, I have made thee this day an iron pillar and brazen walls; and they shall fight against thee, and they shall not prevail." Had this man of whom I speak to-day, a man of the secret strength and the home-like communion, had he anything about him of the iron pillar and the brazen walls? The story of this pulpit for the last thirty years supplies the answer. Iniquity has met with no more valorous and fearless resistant. The magnificence of the evil-doer did not soften the thews of his antagonism. He never bowed to vice because it moved in an imperial robe. Whether evil lurked near a throne or was embodied in a statesman, or was expressed in a law, or diffused itself through a social custom, it mattered not; he encountered it with the tremendous indictment of an Amos, and this house rang with the fiery denunciations of an outraged conscience. His critics have been many, and their criticisms

have been fierce, but not even the fiercest of his critics has charged him with fear or timidity, or accused him of cowering in expedient silence before the marshalled hosts of national sins. He was "stedfast," and therefore "unmoveable"; at home with the Lord, and therefore valiant for the truth.

Now let the apostle again be our guide to the issues. "Stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Let us mark the sequence. This is how it runs: The discovery of the secret of victory at the Cross; at-homeness with the Lord; a character like rock; a splendid affluence of beneficent service! "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." "Always," in season and out of season; "abounding," full to overflowing, almost a superfluity of activity in the gracious ministry; "always abounding in the work of the Lord." And was not all this obtrusively characteristic of the labourer now at rest? What to him was "the work of the Lord"? For him there was but one vocation and one work,—the preaching of the Word,—and in this he "always abounded." You never caught him off duty. No time was inopportune. Preaching was always seasonable. When he was here it was the preacher at work. When he was holidaying the preacher was still at work, turning over the evangel in new surroundings, and permitting the glory of the countryside to add its own suggestion to the interpretation of the truth.

He was "always abounding." I remember his telling me that it was his habit for many years, during every long holiday, to read the Bible through from cover to cover; and he returned from these rest-days with messages more than sufficient to engage him until the holiday-time came round again. How he toiled at the Word, and what rewards he had in spiritual illumination! This Bible can never be the same to me since he passed through it. There are whole passages which shine with light of his kindling, and they can never be put out. I have stood upon the Calton Hill in Edinburgh—stood there in the darkening twilight, and gazed out over the vague and shadowy city. And I have seen the lamp-lighter going his rounds, and I have tracked his progress as he kindled lamp after lamp until the lovely Princes Street stood out an unbroken line of golden light. And I have seen this other lamp-lighter, in the spiritual kingdom, pass down highways of the truth upon which I have looked with dim uncertainty, and he has lit lamp after lamp, lamp after lamp, until to me and to many thousands the streets have been bright with wondrous illumination. My brethren, that has been the pre-eminent ministry of this man's life and service—he has for ever been lighting lamps by which his fellow-pilgrims have found their way home. Did he not once say, "My own ideal of life is daily continuance in spiritual fellowship, and in helping the poor, the

afflicted, and the sorrowing"? Then his own ideal has been richly realised! The poor and the afflicted and the sorrowing have found cheer from his lamps and warmth from his fires. He found his resources at the Cross, and he spent them again in unstinted sacrifice. "Thanks be unto God" . . . that he was "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

And now, my brethren, has the work passed away with the worker? Will the lamps go out, now that the lamplighter has gone? Let us hear the conclusion of the apostle's message: "Ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." I am glad that the Revisers have given us the word "labour" in place of the word "work." "Your labour is not in vain"; your labour, as of a woman with child, your pangs, your heartaches, are not in vain in the Lord. There is work in which there is no labour, no pang, and it dies even before it is born. But labour never dies: intercessory pangs are never fruitless; bleeding sacrifices are never in vain. Our shed blood is our immortal ministry. "Your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The tired labourer is now at home; his labour is still with us, a mighty asset in the common life. "When I reach the Yonderland," said he, "I hope to be welcomed by many a comrade who did not quite understand me down here in the cold, grey clouds of time." He has reached the shores of the Yonderland; he has had the friendly

welcome; his triumph has been consummated in the immediate presence of the King. His fruit remaineth! "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." This is a memorial service! If that is all, we shall sorely ill-use our time. We shall glorify this memorial service if we merge it in a consecration service, if we turn the season of a hallowed memory into the occasion of a holy vow. "Who is on the Lord's side?" Take your stand by him whom we gratefully mention to-day, and his memorial shall be your coronation, and "the joy of the Lord shall be your strength."

COMFORT

BY THE VERY REV. PRINCIPAL ALEX. STEWART, D.D.

COMFORT

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”—2 COR. i. 3, 4.

THESE are words spoken from the heart. This is no commonplace maxim, no cold and vague generality, but the outcome of a deep, genuine, personal experience.

St. Paul himself *had suffered*. He speaks in the context of a trouble which had come to him in Asia, “that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” Then came his wearing anxiety about the Corinthian Church. He had sent Titus, either as the bearer of the first Epistle, or immediately after its despatch, to ascertain its effects, and to report upon the state and disposition of the Christian community at Corinth. He waited anxiously for his return, and followed him by slow stages, until he met him at Philippi. Of his own state of mind at that time the apostle speaks as of one of great despondency. “When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we

were troubled on every side ; without were fightings, within were fears." When Titus came, however, the strain was relieved ; the tidings he brought, in some respects so gloomy, in others were satisfactory, and for this the apostle was thankful. " God," he says, " that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." . . . " Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you ; I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." By the report which Titus brought, his mind was greatly relieved, and hence in the second Epistle, written under the impulse of the news thus brought, it was characteristic of him that prominent reference should be made to this brighter side, and that in the very beginning of it he should give utterance to words like these : " Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort ; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." But though in the first instance thus strictly personal in its reference (and the fact rather heightens than diminishes its value for us), this may be fitly regarded as a typical utterance of the Christian spirit in the presence of suffering borne at any time in a Christian way. Let us observe, therefore, *first*, the relation of comfort to trouble ; *secondly*, the source of comfort ; and, *thirdly*, the use of comfort.

I

First, then, the relation of comfort to trouble.

Sorrow is an indisputable fact of human experience. In many respects it is also an inexplicable fact; but there it is. We cannot account for it, but we all feel it. We may soar upon the wings of thought into the highest heaven, we may sink the plummet of inquiry into the depth, but we should not touch the bounds of this mystery. How did pain and grief ever enter into a universe ruled by a perfectly wise and loving God? Why, having entered, is it not by an act of the Omnipotent Will at once and for ever removed? How is it that its pangs are to all appearance so unevenly distributed, falling so heavily upon one, so lightly upon another; here harassing and cutting short a career of usefulness, there sparing a cumberer of the ground; here crushing the hopes of struggling virtue, and there leaving free and unrestrained the development of vice? These are questions which have agitated the minds of men ever since men began to think at all. And it might not be difficult to point out some considerations tending to lessen the perplexity, and to reconcile the mind to the existence and continuance of the physical evils referred to; it might be shown that, even so far as we can see, there is less real evil in their permission than there would be in their absolute compulsory removal. But when

we come to deal with sorrow, not merely as a practical but as a personal fact, no general considerations suffice; speculation is powerless to assuage grief. We only know it is there, and we must either have it taken away or must be taught how to bear it; in other words, we feel the pain, and we long after either happiness or comfort. And of the two it is *not happiness but comfort* that God has appointed for us. "I pray not," said Christ of His disciples, "that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil"; and He began His Sermon on the Mount by declaring that the poor, the suffering, the mourning—all whom we call unhappy—are blessed, "for they shall be comforted." The poisonous weed may not indeed be uprooted, but beside the bane is planted the antidote; the disease has penetrated the system, but the healing medicine is provided and applied; the stream of sorrow, pain, and death traverses humanity, but where it flows flow also the waters of the river of life, that pour from the unsealed well of comfort and of peace. Can we say, then, that to have suffered and to be comforted is better than never to have suffered at all? We may presently see that it is so, meanwhile we humbly recognise that the arrangements of God's providence appear to *assume* that it is so. Can we say that any life we can imagine was more blessed than that of Christ? Yet what life was more full of suffering? But when the

tempter left Him, angels came and ministered to Him ; when agonised in Gethsemane, an angel stood by Him and strengthened Him ; it was when His soul was troubled that the Voice was heard from heaven : " I have both glorified My name, and will glorify it again " ; and scarcely had He cried, " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? " than there returned to Him the spirit of trustful calm, which enabled Him to say, " Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Thus, with Him, comfort was the attendant and antidote of permitted sorrow ; and the two are inseparably associated in every Christian life. There is a region where " there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain " ; but here on earth these are to be encountered, not escaped or avoided, and the true happiness is in the encounter to be cheered by hope and strengthened by comfort.

II

Observe then, secondly, how the apostle points us to the *source of comfort*.

" Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation." There is something very touching in this expansion of the name of God, this seizing, as it were, and unfolding of that aspect of God's nature and dealings,

which is suited to the apostle's present position ; of how much contemplation were these pregnant phrases the essence and result. How much might we gain if we could remember that God's character has different sides, and that these different sides are suited to our several needs ; how much Christian tact is needed at once to grasp that aspect of it which is most full of help to us ! The guilty require to dwell, not upon Omnipotence and Omniscience, but upon Mercy and Loving-kindness, while he who is assured of mercy requires to think of an Almighty God in order to ward off every fear. To St. Paul in his trouble comes the thought of "the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort." He lays his foundation deep and broad, he builds on it with certainty, and then he rests on it with security. The God whom he worships and in whom he trusts is no abstract, far-off, unknown Divinity, but the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, the God whom Christ came to reveal, the Father of whom He declared that He Himself was the everlasting and well-beloved Son. This was the central fact, the deepest truth of the apostle's spiritual experience, the basis of the life he lived and the hopes by which he was sustained. If this were not reliable, then was his whole career a mistake, and he himself of all men most miserable. But of this truth he was assured, and to it he referred all else.

What, then, could be the Father of whom Jesus was the Son, what the God whom Jesus had made known? "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," He said, and those who saw *Him* looked upon incarnate love and mercy and gentleness. "The Son of God loved me," says St. Paul, "and gave Himself for me"; and in that self-sacrificing devotion he saw a reflection and an echo of the love of God. And Christ consecrated suffering for those who came after Him, by making acceptance and willing endurance of it a token of answering devotion to Himself, an entrance into His life. In the very verse succeeding our text, St. Paul speaks of the sufferings he himself endured as the sufferings of Christ shared by him. And had not Christ said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good courage, I have overcome the world"? Had He not promised, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world"? He, then, who had given His Son for men, would He not with Him also freely give all things needful? and to whom could men look for comfort and help in difficulty rather than to God, even the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ?

And God is also the *Father of mercies*. Here we turn to a yet more special aspect of His character, we look to a particular side of the revelation vouchsafed to us in Christ. God is the God of salvation, He trains and disciplines His

people; but neither of these thoughts is special enough for the apostle's purpose. He might be thought of thus, and yet the thought of Him lack the power it should possess in the hour of trial. But He is "the Father of mercies." Mercy is His delight, and all the bounties which make our lives pleasant and beautiful and profitable are His gifts. He is the God of Providence, who causes His sun to shine and His rain to fall, who maketh the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; He is the author of our being, the Father of spirits. And in Christ He is pre-eminently revealed as a God of mercy, loving the sinner and seeking the lost; the darkest clouds which gathered between the human soul and God, the clouds of doubt and distrust and error, vanish in the bright sunshine of His presence. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; He is the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift; what seemed before hard and terror-striking in the relations between heaven and earth are seen to be misapprehensions; God's name is love, and He has no harshness, no terror save for persistent and unbelieving wickedness. His words are, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; "Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light." God is, indeed, the *Father of mercies*.

And yet another concentration of the rays of

Divine glory in the lens of faith. What could the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father of mercies be but *the God of all comfort*? Surely this is the assurance that ought to awaken perfect love and cast out all fear. God knows our need, and He has not left it unsupplied; He knows that we have perplexity, trial, pain, and He has provided comfort. It is the tenderest office of love; none but those who love can comfort; and none other are permitted to try. Yet "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him"; "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." And He is the God of *all* comfort. There are many occasions on which an earthly friend is powerless to console; but when do we cast our burden upon the Lord and find Him unable and unwilling to sustain? The world may desert us, human friendship may prove vain or disappointing, but the rod and staff of the Most High will comfort us. "Blessed be the God of *all* comfort, who comforteth us in *all* our tribulation."

III

And now, in the third place, let us consider *the uses of comfort in affliction.*

It has uses, and those most important and necessary. It may be that the knowledge which men have of them is not sufficient to make clear to us

God's permission of evil as an element in His universe, but they certainly assist us greatly to understand why being there it is not forcibly removed.

Note, then, how the sorrow he had endured deepened the apostle's *sense* of the *value* of God's *presence* and love. Would, without it, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ ever have become so truly to him the Father of mercies and God of all comfort? And was it no gain that he had thus learned God? Was it not a gain that he might well consider outweighed all his lack of outward joy and prosperity? If in this world there had been perpetual sunshine and no night, should we not have lost our knowledge of that infinity whose depths the *stars* reveal?

Note, further, that sorrow is made a *means of spiritual training*. Not that trial and suffering in themselves have power to make men holier or more heavenly. Upon many they have the very opposite effect—making them gloomy, selfish, and envious. They harden the heart instead of making it tender and sympathetic. They may come and overwhelm a man in their dark waves, and yet, when their tide recedes, it may leave him impure and worldly as before. Let no one think, then, that he is necessarily the better for having been tried. It is not so, and yet it is true that trial is most generally the instrument which God employs for softening the hard-hearted, for subduing the proud, for teaching endur-

ance and patience, for expanding the sympathies, for exercising the religious affections, for refining, strengthening, and elevating the entire disposition and character. You cast the ore into the furnace, in order to obtain the pure gold unalloyed with any dross ; so men must pass through those fires of affliction which try every man's work of what sort it is. "And no one," it has been observed, "who has borne suffering aright has ever complained that he had been called on to endure too much of it. On the contrary, all the noblest of our race have learned from experience to count suffering not an evil but a privilege, and to rejoice in it as working out in them, through its purifying and perfecting power, an eternal weight of glory." St. Paul had learned to "glory in tribulations also : knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience"—in other words, that the result of trial is, or ought to be, the *discipline and enlargement of the spirit*. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews illustrates the same truth by another analogy. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not ? . . . We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence : should we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live ?" But the grand consideration is that the way which Christians have to tread is the way of the *Cross* ; taking up that and following Him

who first bore it, we are led into all joy and blessedness. He bids us take His yoke upon us; and a yoke is not merely a burden to be borne, but a means by which we may be guided in the way. Through the valley of sorrow, but not alone; called to endurance, but not unstrengthened; tried, but not without comfort: such is the Christian's path. It is described by St. Paul himself in this Epistle in words which evince the vividness with which he realised at once the affliction and the comfort. "We are troubled," he says, "on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

Surely, when to the eye of sense all was darkness, the eye of faith beheld the light; and a spirit thus tried and triumphant was being fashioned for an exalted place in that kingdom of heaven where to the faithful unto death is awarded the crown of life.

And note once more that affliction thus comforted bestows the power of *sympathy*. This is, indeed, one side of that discipline and elevation of the spirit of which we have just spoken. But it is specially alluded to in the text, "Blessed be God, who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that *we may be able to comfort them* who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are

comforted of God." If he had gained nothing else than this power of sympathising and administering comfort, and so of scattering blessings around him, the noble, unselfish spirit of the apostle would count it well worth all that he had undergone. "He jests at scars who never felt a wound"—and none can truly sympathise with the sorrowful save those who have themselves passed through sorrow.

"One writes, that 'Other friends remain,'
That 'Loss is common to the race,'
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well-meant for grain.

That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more;
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break."

St. Paul himself had learned the lesson of which he speaks. "Who is weak," he cries, "and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" So when the Lord said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," He was teaching him the same lesson of turning his own trials to the benefit of others. Was it not the lesson which our Lord Himself condescended to be taught, when "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered"; "For in that He Himself suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted"; and so "we have not an High Priest

who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"?

Whosoever you be, then, afflicted brother or sister, we bid you taste of this everflowing fountain of comfort. Earth is prolific of sorrow, but barren of consolations. Time may blunt the edge of grief, but the edge may be blunted and yet the blessed work it was intended to achieve be left undone; rather let it, while yet keen and fresh, be sheathed in the bosom of eternal Love. Let your hope and trust be in God, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation." Cast your care upon Him, for He careth for you; hide not your wounds from His love and tenderness, He will pour into them the soothing oil and the healing wine. And let your trial enable you to minister more efficiently to others; let it make you a missionary of help and comfort to homes visited by bereavement, and hearts racked with pain. Be sure that this among others was God's will in sending it, that you might comfort them who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith you yourselves are comforted by God. No other—no less; "freely ye have received, freely give," and "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

"Blessed be God," says the apostle; and this

perhaps is the hardest of all to say. Rebellious nature will not cry, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Yet this, too, may come when God gives us strength; meanwhile let us whisper the humble prayer, "Not our will, but Thine be done."

THE ETERNAL AND THE
TEMPORAL

By REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



THE ETERNAL AND THE TEMPORAL

“For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—2 COR. iv. 18.

ST. PAUL is giving us here a definition of the religious life mainly, but what he says is also a philosophy of human life generally. We look at the things which are not seen. Some person, who is too clever by half, and therefore very foolish, stops there and calls it a contradiction. How can we look at things which are not seen! A wiser man knows that the contradiction is an actual fact of every day's experience. We walk by faith more than sight, and by imagination more than vision. A bit of gold stamped with the queen's head is not much to look at, especially if it be old and worn. A penny fresh from the Mint is really a better picture for the eyes; but if I offered it you in exchange for the sovereign, one of us would regard the other as a lunatic. In that piece of gold you see things which cannot be seen—purchasing power, exchangeable value, a world of gratified desires. There is a picture hanging on your walls of a beautiful

girl, a face unknown to you, an artist's fancy, and alongside is a portrait of your own mother, perhaps withered and worn. The girl's face is far better looking at than the other to a stranger, but not to you. For that dear mother's face calls up a hundred things which cannot be seen. A lady's hat done up with peacock's feathers and sundry other finery is far grander to look at than the square yard of coarse bunting which you call a flag; but the flag will inspire sublime daring and self-sacrifice, while the peacock's feathers are just a momentary sensation and no more. It is not the vision of the eyes, but the unseen things which the vision suggests, that move us. And the religious life is really this same thing carried out in higher matters. It looks beyond the show to what is behind the show. It sees back of the visible panorama of the world the hidden power which made it and moves it. It sees behind all the fading wealth and finery of life something more substantial and more lasting. It sees on earth's passing scenes suggestions of things that abide, and, beyond the grave, that over which the grave has no power. It is always feeling its way through the mortal to the immortal—through the symbol to the greater things symbolised. It believes that in everything there is something more than we can see, and that faith's world is infinitely larger than the world of vision; and the keynote of

all its songs is this: "For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Now that is the largest truth in the world. It is written on everything—sky, air, earth, and sea. Every man believes it, and must believe it, if he thinks at all. We are always forgetting it; and yet it is strange that we can forget it, for there are forcible reminders of it at every stage of life. Everything reminds us that what we see is short-lived, a passing show, a bit of stage scenery, a bird on the wing, perishable and perishing; and yet, hidden in the midst of all that, and unseen, there is always something which abides, which outlasts time and decay, which speaks to us of immortality, which bears the mark of a changeless and eternal God.

Everything dies, and nothing dies. That is life's great riddle and God's riddle, and if you do not understand it you have everything to learn yet.

There is decay and death in all things, and imperishable life in all things. God preaches a sermon to us on this text with the coming of every season, and it is but a sample of what He is teaching us every day. When autumn withers all the summer foliage, scatters the damp joyless leaves at your feet, and leaves nothing of all the past glory but heaps of refuse for the besom to clear and the wind to drive, you hear in every sound a sigh like this, "The

things which are seen are temporal." But then you look further, and remember that this clearance of decayed stuff is only to prepare for a new suit of nature's clothing not many months hence. I hear men say that the autumn makes them sad. It breathes despondency in every breeze. It is like the melancholy prophet muttering, "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of the field." And I suppose that there is for all of us a touch of depression in the autumn air, a little shiver of fear in the sight of its decaying splendour; yet why should it be so? Even there we hear the other voice, "But the things which are not seen are eternal." It is only the outside that perishes. The tree has life within itself which will break into joyous beauty again when the springtime comes—the very flowers drop their seed and live again—nature only casts its garments and sleeps awhile, and awakes again, when morning comes, as strong and beautiful as ever. If you tell me that everything preaches of death, I answer yes, and everything preaches of immortality—everything dies, and nothing dies. There is the great riddle again of which faith finds the solution in God, "The things which are seen are temporal"; but always in the midst of the seen there is something of the unseen which is eternal. Each human life reads the same lesson if we have only wisdom to receive it. We are always changing as we grow in years; yet there is something deeper in us which

changes not. We leave everything behind, yet we carry a great deal with us. We bury everything that we had in childhood, yet the child survives in the man. We are different beings altogether, and yet substantially the same. I meet a friend whom I have not seen for twenty years, and do not recognise him. I start with surprise when I hear his name. In build, complexion, outward appearance, he is another man. Then he speaks to me; the tone of voice, the expression of the eyes, the grasp of the hand, bring back a thousand memories. He is just the man I knew. Everything is gone, yet enough remains. Darby and Joan are the same to each other as when they enjoyed their first stolen kiss in the moonlight. Young people smile at the thought. It is difficult to think of those two old people as lovers at the trysting-place. Who would recognise the portraits which they exchanged in the sweet young days? So many trials and storms have worn those faces, so many worries and burdens have bowed their lithe and sprightly figures, so many experiences have given a new colour and texture to their thought; and still they go on singing, "Always the same to your dear old Joan." Everything is changed, and yet there is no change. That is the sweet pathos of life. It is the eternal mystery—the unseen abides in every one of us. We are always dying, yet behold we live. The immortal breathes through our mortal flesh, and God is always preach-

ing resurrection and renewal to us through our very changes and decay. "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal."

You get the same lesson if you look at human life on a larger scale. The fashions of the world change, and there is perpetual flux, waste, and decay. Humanity puts on new garments, takes up new thoughts, opinions, ambitions, and desires, yet there is something everlasting which abides. We say that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is the blessed assurance of our faith; but it is almost as true to say that man is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is only the surface fashion and garments that pass away, the deeper life changes not. There was a striking picture in the Paris Exhibition of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. All passers-by were arrested by the boldness of the conception. Some few looked behind the boldness at the greater truth. Jesus is there as He used to be, in the dress of Galilee; but everything else is modern and Parisian. The guests are dressed in the style of to-day's dinner-party. The furniture and table ornaments and banquet are up to date. The smoke of cigarettes is curling in thin volumes from moustached mouths, and the fallen woman is there with French face and faded Parisian beauty. Yet substantially it is the same scene as that enacted in Simon's house. The

host looks on Jesus with an air of patronage; two or three are lighting their cigarettes with contemptuous insolence as He speaks. A few have forgotten the banquet and everything else as they look with rapt attention into His wonderful face, and listen eagerly to His words. And the woman is kneeling, worshipping as if her very life hung upon a look, and as if His forgiving word opened for her the door of heaven. The meaning is plain enough. The nineteen hundred years have made no difference. New fashions are put on, but the old heart remains. The same desires, the same longings, the same yielding of souls to the magic power of Jesus, the same thirsting and panting for forgiveness and hope, the same weariness and jaded feelings in those to whom His voice has no meaning, and also the same contemptuous disregard of the hardened and frivolous heart. Every gathering of men to-day is made up of the same faces and natures as that company in Simon's house. Amid all the change of human nature there is an everlasting element. There is everlasting need and everlasting weariness until God and Christ are found. "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

And yet you sometimes talk about the difficulty of believing in things unseen, and the difficulty of believing that life will continue after this mortal state. Is it difficult to believe when you remember all that I have named, and a thousand other

things which I have not named? I say that God shows you eternal things everywhere alongside the temporal, and preaches to you sermons of life through very texts of death. There is always a continuity in the midst of change, always something eternal rising out of decay, always something immortal to rebuke your mortal fears; there is a human love in us that never dies; there are hopes that never perish; there is a growth that never ceases; there are good thoughts that never leave us; there are joys which no man can take away; there is something always beyond that we are drawn to; there is something out of sight to which we are always stretching our unsatisfied and aching hands. The body pants for a deliverance which lies beyond; the soul hungers for a larger portion than it has ever known; the whole of our nature cries out for that future which is still unrevealed. And God has written eternity in the hidden heart of all things, not to mock us with vain dreams, but to make us certain that there is a happier and nobler life behind the veil.

If you would live well and sweetly, you must believe at every point that there are unseen eternal things beneath all that is temporal and seen; you must believe it concerning your own moral endeavour. To walk by sight is to learn despair of yourselves. For the things which are seen, which are always to the front, are the base and less godly things—

the temptations, imperfections, frustrated efforts, blemishes, carnal yieldings, fits of weariness, and spasms of utter unbelief. If you judged yourselves and your future by these things only, you would lose every beautiful vision and every hope. But these are the temporal things which perish; slowly are they passing away like the autumn leaves from every praying life. But underneath them is the eternal Christ, born into every faithful heart, living on through all changes, and shaping Himself there into abiding strength and beauty. Look through your worrying weaknesses and failures to that deeper, nobler self which the Spirit of Christ is making for you the man that is to be—the man of faith and love and goodness, meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Remember concerning yourselves that the outside, with its infirmities, perishes, and the inner life, with its Divine possibilities, abides. "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

You will need it, as St. Paul needed it, in the dark and cloudy days when the heart has its trouble and fears, when there is perhaps more pain than joy, and when one thing after another which has been dear to you slips away as the day fades into the night. Then you will be happy again, as he was, when you remember that it is only the outward man that perishes, and that all the deeper things remain; that, of all which God has given you, nothing will be per-

manently taken away which it is good for you to have; and that the pain, whatever it may be, is the short night's discipline which prepares you for the joy in the morning.

Harriet Martineau said to a Christian man, "I do not believe in immortality; but if I did believe it as you profess to do, I should live a far better life than you appear to live. I should strive more earnestly and bear more patiently. I do not think I should ever be troubled with a fear, or wearied with an earthly burden. I think it would be all sunlight and joy if I believed as you do in eternal things—in resurrection, and a life beyond in which all things will be made right."

And so it would be with all of us if we did believe, if we most surely believed every day that Christ has made us as He was Himself after the power of an endless life, if we believed in every hour of temptation and sorrow this word of the apostle: "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

FROM STRESS TO TRIUMPH

By REV. THOMAS G. SELBY.

FROM STRESS TO TRIUMPH

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These which are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."—REV. vii. 13-17 (R.V.).

ONE of the motives of this mysterious book was to give to the primitive Church a more adequate perspective of God's purpose in the ages. The view of the world's future held by the first and even the second generation of disciples resembled those rude outline pictures of antiquity in which perspective and background are entirely wanting. The passing decade was all, and no vistas of long centuries packed with human life stretched away to the skyline. To-day was climacteric, and to-morrow the world would have no history, for Christ would be

here to consummate all things by a final judgment.

The Apocalypse corrects this insularity of outlook upon the ages by bringing into the field of vision a succession of pregnant and fateful epochs. The seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials are more or less specific landmarks of time. Through long extended epochs thus marked off from each other, Jesus Christ would continue to reap fruit of His redeeming pain, and gather unto Himself a new elect to take the place of the old. Between the dramatic acts which pass before the seer's view, and which he recites to us, glimpses of the celestial city and its scenes are interposed for the comfort of those in distress. Every epoch sends its contingent of meet and purified souls to stand in the presence of God and the Lamb. The words of the text are a sublime parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals. Just as the traveller sometimes sees through a rift in the mists a gleaming of sunlit towers and pinnacles on far-away horizons, so through the veil of this dim and awful symbolism we get glimpses of the rainbow-circled throne, fair fields where God spreads His pavilion over the transfigured multitudes, and living fountains to which the Divine Shepherd leads the flock He has redeemed with His own precious blood.

I

Two features in the past history of the victorious hosts are briefly indicated.

The elder who draws near to interpret the vision speaks of *the discipline through which the multitude has passed*—a lesson not without its significance to this saint in exile. "These are they which come out of the great tribulation."

In this unique book of visions there is a strange juxtaposition of the terrible and the serene. Thick and ominous shadows fall on all the early pages, and the heralds of manifold woes trouble the air with the beating of their wings. The peace of which Jesus had spoken in His last discourse with the disciples was obviously no such peace as had become linked in Jewish thought with the reign of Solomon. That epoch at least was not likely to return. In almost the same breath the great Teacher told His followers that in the world they should have tribulation—a word now verified by a hundred signs. The figures of battle, famine, plague, which are visualised before the mind of the seer and made to move in their black stormy masses through the scenes of history, are shadows projected by the tribulation of which Jesus had forewarned His followers. The trumpet-blasts of the angels ushering in change, portent, distress, are solemn echoes of His prophetic word a generation ago. It was necessary that the early

Church should be apprised of the struggles through which it must pass; and it was perhaps still more necessary it should be made to see how the followers of Jesus might pass, unhurt by these portentous ordeals, into the presence of God on high. The triumphant and transfigured throng is brought to its high vantage-ground from the blackest profound of darkness.

“The great tribulation.” The Revised Version inserts the definite article, which gives a specific meaning to the words wanting in the earlier translation. Some commentators find here an express reference to the persecutions under Nero, of which John in Patmos was the victim; and others think the definite article is intended to indicate the scenes of wrath and judgment which followed upon the opening of the sixth seal. Its purpose may be wider. All the distresses which afflict the Church and the world are viewed as one. Just as the ten thousand lamps in a huge city blend their upcast rays into the cloud of red mist which invests it at nightfall, so the sorrows of Christ’s servants in all ages gather themselves into one great lurid mass before the view of the seer. It is from the world’s great storm-centre of violence and whirling wrath that the children of light emerge into victory. “The great tribulation.” Common causes give rise to it. The stress and pain of the individual disciple is not peculiar to his own lot, but is part of a whole.

Some epochs may be marked by violent forms of persecution and distress, but in every age hostile tempers work against the outward happiness and well-being of Christ's followers. The hounded apostle of the first century and the uncompromising confessor of the last, stand beneath the same eclipse. There is under every form of government the same prejudice against the plain, pure ethic of Jesus Christ, the same tendency to pitiless rancour, the same sensibility to pain in the victims, the same subjection to death. This hostile temper works in one age by the engine of physical torture, and in another by sneer, slander, and social ostracism. The hot, bitter springs from which tears come are the same in all ages, and never run quite dry. That which the seer here describes is a specific, undivided, palpitating pain running through the frame of Christ's mystical body, filling up in all ages that which is behind of His sufferings. This presentation of the purifying chastisements of successive epochs in their wholeness is not a mere æsthetic peculiarity in the prophetic way of viewing things, a tendency of temperament to overlook detail and to see the mass. All the members of Christ's body are one, and possess a common sensibility to the sufferings of the faithful in all ages. The personal and the periodic standpoint is lost, and the view becomes altruistic and collective in the broadest meaning of the words. John in exile and slavery was taught by his visions

to regard his own privations as passing notes in that long storm of wrath which should sweep over the Churches of all centuries. Apostles, fathers, reformers, evangelists of all communions share one common lot, and pass to victory through the stress of one common tribulation. And the grace which gives the victory over every trial is as common as the causes in which the trial arises. St. Peter uses the same thought in his first Epistle: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, . . . as though a strange thing happened unto you." The tribulation is one.

The weird imagery of this book seems to suggest that the stages of the tribulation are so ordered that it achieves the ends of a great spiritual discipline. The convulsions which rend the earth are one and all determined by movements before the throne of God in heaven. The saints are sealed ere the restless forces of destruction rush forth upon their errands, and the trials which are to prove high qualities take place under the eye of a watching God and amidst the ministries of His messengers. The distracted world is not a sheer anarchy of diabolism, as the sufferers might be tempted to think. The Sovereignty in heaven directs the path of the storms, and the storms do not break till the elect of God are made ready for their ordeals. The appointed cycles of tribulation test the faithful as they tested Job in the ancient days. Scenes of disquiet and calamity

cannot work the spiritual havoc one might fear, making religious faith all but impossible. Innumerable hosts come forth out of the great tribulation. It is indeed the very discipline which prepares God's people for their triumph. As needful is it that the children of light before the throne should be tried and perfected by their keen and manifold distresses, as that they should be washed from their sins in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. It is because their fidelity has been verified in the struggles of the past that they are before the throne, to the praise and glory of Him who redeemed them. They are welcomed with tenderness and fostered with exquisite care because of all that through which they have passed. The waving of the palm branches would have been mere pantomime, and the ringing jubilations an empty stage-chorus, apart from the stress, conflict, and vicissitude over which the Lord's people have triumphed.

The interpreting elder sketches the past history of the redeemed multitude in *its ethical inwardness*. The life once lived upon earth was a life of purifying faith in the Divine sacrifice. "They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Admitted to the holiest sanctuary of all worlds, they minister before God as priests and kings. But it is through the blood of propitiation that they have won access to this high standing-ground. When Aaron and his sons were separated

to the work of the sanctuary, the blood placed upon the altar was also sprinkled upon their raiment, indicating that the honour investing them rested upon a basis of atonement. These uncounted multitudes John saw massed about the throne were fitted for their employments by a spiritual process of which this was the ceremonial sign. They were not there because they had suffered for the kingdom of heaven. The triumph they celebrate with palm and song was not made good by personal courage, virtue, abnegation. The holy Stephen was there, whose form had been crushed by the stones of his frenzied assailants; James, who had been slain with the sword; Simon Peter, who, crucified head downwards, had maintained an unmurmuring patience of love to the end. The courage, heroism, unselfishness exemplified in that throng surpassed the highest goals hitherto reached in the heroic ages of history. And yet the princieliest of these victors is there upon the same ground as the penitent thief. The one next the throne reached his standing-ground through faith in the all-sufficient sacrifice. They had never been strengthened to prevail but by the power of this purification. It was the sanctity they acquired through trust in the Cross which marked them out for God's guardianship through their troubled and harassed lives, and made them meet for their shining inheritance. When Jesus was transfigured, the light came from within, blending itself with the Father's

presence of encircling glory. But the splendour of His transfigured followers is acquired and not inherent. The link between the transfiguration of the Master and that of His disciples was the decease which He accomplished at Jerusalem. "They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Men are sometimes admitted to temples of earthly fame who have won brilliant victories by land or by sea, thus earning a nation's gratitude; but their private morality has been dismal. The most splendid service will not ensure admission into this temple. Guilt must be cleansed, and all the active powers of the life must be hallowed through the faith which centres itself upon the Cross.

The question, Does this washing imply forgiveness or sanctification? is a superfluous refinement. Some expositors of the text have held that the washing means removal of past guilt by the grace which justifies, and that the making white means full purification of the nature by that further act of grace which sanctifies body, soul, and spirit. It is unnecessary to draw so rigid a line between these two steps in man's salvation; or at least this figurative expression can scarcely be taken as the basis of the distinction. The New Testament does not always differentiate these combined effects of Christ's redeeming death, because in genuine experience they are inseparable. There can be no forgiveness which is not sanctifying in its issue,

and which does not begin to be sanctifying in the moment the knowledge of it is conveyed to the conscience. Such is the Divine order, sure and unchanging. To debate this distinction is like asking, Does the snow which silvers the crests of the mountains derive its whiteness from the shining of the sun, or from the precipitation of those impurities with which the particles were charged before the process of evaporation took place? It is the same sun which does the two things, and the removal of the stain gives access to the glittering floods of light. The washing away of past contaminations gives free course to the grace which waits to refine and irradiate the pardoned soul. Sanctification is the completed effect of that faith in Christ's sacrifice which is expressed by the figure of washing, for the robes thus cleansed are the eternal adornment of the redeemed. The glory, apparelling as with light this uncounted throng, is not some new touch of splendour alighting upon the faithful when they have gasped the last troubled breath of earth, nor is it some resurrection halo kindling itself within the saints as they emerge from the tomb, if indeed this vision may be considered otherwise than as a vision of disembodied spirits. It is entirely moral both in its beginning and its consummation. The whiteness was not attained by miracle when the earthly house was dissolved. The robes which do not show dim or soiled in the city

whose gates are pearl, and which keep their consistent pureness before the crystal sea and the holy throne, were cleansed in sacrificial blood.

II

This vision brings into view the higher destiny upon which God's redeemed servants have entered.

Four elements combine in the gladness of this beatific life:—The Satisfactions of Victory, The Honour of Service, The Shepherd Guidance with the Fulness of Life to which it Leads, and the Divine Act which ends Sorrow.

Was not John learning through these revelations to think of heaven by the method to which the Master had invited His disciples many years before? When they asked, with an obvious wish to gain some glimpse of that new kingdom of life into which Jesus was about to pass, "Whither goest Thou?" adding also somewhat querulously, "We know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" the reply had been, "I am the way"; which was to say, You shall know if you come nearer to Me; for that far-off life can only be apprehended through living, experimental relationships. John was now entering into this nearer intimacy, and his views of heaven were furnished by his own sense of spiritual fellowship. In his union with God through Jesus Christ he had become a

priest, and the life of heaven was a ministry of yet higher privilege in which God had spread a pavilion over His attending servants. He had long committed his soul to the keeping of that Shepherd Love of which he heard Jesus speak at Jerusalem; and heaven renewed the relationship, and through scenes of unearthly splendour the Shepherd led His blood-bought flock into new quests and fuller satisfactions. And as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who raised Him from the dead, had wiped away the many tears shed at His tomb, so should the same God at length wipe away the tears of the great tribulation, and comfort His afflicted people as one whom his mother comforteth. Folded up within every renewed heart there are the best and the most vivid types of the celestial life. The relations established within it are the most solid forecasts, the most veracious anticipations, the truest gleams of the glory laid up for those who are friends and followers of Jesus.

The life of the glorified first presents itself to the mind of John as *a grand victory* in which uncounted hosts participate. Tuneful multitudes meet in the wide temple, where God's throne is set, exulting in a common deliverance. Some reminiscence of the Feast of Tabernacles perhaps lies in the background of the picture. The Jews were accustomed to observe that season of rejoicing by putting up triumphal arches, camping out upon the tops of

their houses in arbours of evergreens and waving branches of trees, thus testifying their joy at escaping from the hand of Pharaoh, and from the terrible plagues which had blasted the country of their sojourn. This vision assures the exiled seer that the life beyond the veil is a festival of victory. He had been tempted perhaps to look upon himself and his companions in tribulation as defeated, crushed, fatally discredited, and overthrown. But the victims of a pagan persecuting Imperialism are now seen to be victors, and they ascribe their salvation to God and the Lamb, who Himself conquered sublimely at the Cross in His apparent overthrow. They have risen above those judgments of wrath which a retributive providence let loose for a time upon the world to desolate the adversaries of Christ's kingdom. They have triumphed over unseen hosts, leagued together against God's elect and the cause they had at heart. Through faith they have prevailed against the wrath of Antichrist, and the great pagan empires are led captive to adorn their triumph. They have proved stronger than their own frailties in all the distresses appointed for the testing of their fidelity. By their contemporaries they were counted as filth and offscouring. They left the world as defeated men, unpitied as they were thrown to the wild beasts, scoffed at as the sword fell upon them; but they reappear in the realms of light "more than conquerors." The battle

they waged was final, and they at least will never have to fight out its issues again. To him who trusts in Christ's sacrifice, the after-life will prove there can be no overthrow. The sense of a well-won victory, the victory of the highest of all causes, pulsates in the life of the glorified. "Salvation to our God which sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb."

The elder goes on to describe the redeemed as raised to *a priesthood of worship and service*. This is the central absorbing employment of the new state upon which they have entered. "Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple." Standing on this high vantage-ground, new views of God and His ways break in upon their meditations like a series of ever-brightening day-dawns. Of old they had seen God and His workings from afar, catching only pale, distant gleams as they stood straining their eyes on the outskirts of the world. Now they look upon the deeper meanings and mysteries of the Divine government, for they are at the centre from which every issue proceeds. Endless worship is saved from staleness by the new realms of thought ascending into view. And the growing penetration of their insight fits for a wider co-operation with the Divine counsels. In song, in homage, in manifold ministries which never lose their sweetness, "they serve him day and night in His temple." To a tender and a grateful heart, earth offers no purer

and more lasting delight than that of service. The service of the infinite love in heaven shall be rich in nobler inspirations, corresponding to the transcendent worthiness of Him who is its supreme object. Do you ask, What soul-satisfying principle is there in service which can fill the cup of human blessedness, and yield that perfect joy we associate with the life of heaven? To the man who, with a free mind and a loving heart, does God's will, the question will be answered from within. Is it needful to remind you of the sacred rapture which arises at each step in the fulfilment of a God-given task, of the peace suffusing the spirit with an atmosphere vital and fragrant as that which steals down from the peaks and the pine-woods of the mountains, of the solemn gladness that pours like a legion of hymning angels through the opened gate Jacob saw in his dream—a gladness the strong tides of which all but bear down the flesh. The service of heaven yields such joy in its rarest essence. And over these ministers of His perfect will the supreme God stretches out His protecting power as a curtain. "And He that sitteth on His throne shall spread His tabernacle over them." They are not unclothed. They have passed into the sanctuary not made with hands, and are hidden in the secret place of God's pavilion. Where are they? What took place after the last breath? At what point of time did suffering cease? We cannot tell. They are with the

Lord, who has spread over them new heavens like a curtain. Let this satisfy the broken hearts of those who mourn their faithful dead.

These triumphant saints are still *in fellowship with the Good Shepherd* who laid down His life for the sheep. This thought is brought out in the Revised Version: "The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd." Between Himself and those who have been made white by His sacrificial blood there is a bond no change can weaken or destroy. The comfort and beauty of this thought will perhaps be felt more deeply if we put into contrast with it the fate of the worldly man as described in the forty-ninth Psalm: "They are appointed as a flock for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd" (R.V.). Of those believers who have passed from view the Lord Jesus is Shepherd, and He leads His ransomed flock to the living fountains of water. The colouring of this holy picture is essentially pastoral. The man who saw this vision could not have been satisfied unless it had established within him the hope of getting back into some higher form of his early relationship with his Galilean friend and counsellor. The ministry of the Good Shepherd does not close when He has brought back a lost sheep to the fold, and the wilderness is not the only scene of its activities. In the unknown land into which our friends pass, and from which no messages come back to us, redeemed souls still

need His guiding hand. They are not left to explore for themselves the mysteries of the strange world into which they have gone, and to discover its riches. He tends His own there just as graciously as in this hard, bleak sphere of peril and distress. They have faded from our view, old men and little children alike, and we can do nothing more to help them. But they are still under the eye and the hand of the Good Shepherd. He who guided the outgoings of His first disciples amidst the hills of Galilee and by the lake-shore, through the plains of Samaria and in the highlands of Judea, will guide the quests of the celestial life. The hand that multiplied the bread on earth will minister the mystic manna. The holy feet that went before the disciples will lead into the pathways of the living fountains. The old pastoral fellowship is re-established. He will give of the best things of His kingdom on high just as freely as He made the disciples share every blessing of His own lot upon earth. The life to come will be infinitely varied, and the Lord Himself will show the way into the mysteries of its manifold blessedness. "The Lamb which is on the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life." Our vast thirst, our irrepressible yearning, our countless and complex aspirations, will be satisfied under His leadership. And because of the tender care and ministry of this Shepherd King, hunger and thirst,

and the fevers kindled by the untempered sun, shall cease. The old Psalm celebrating the care of the Divine Shepherd receives a new interpretation, from which "shadow," "enemy," and "wilderness" disappear. We can surely resign our friends if we may resign them to this pastoral love which rules beyond the veil.

The last touch in this picture sets forth *the Eternal God as the Comforter of His saved people*. "And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." Through all earthly vicissitudes He had been their light and salvation, illuminating their gloom, turning their mourning into joy, and appointing them beauty for ashes. It is an old relationship He resumes and consummates. Not only is He the object of worship upon the throne, He comes nearer still to the redeemed multitude, healing all the smarts of earth, and dispersing the last memory of pain. Now and again we hear Christian teachers whispering that pain is not a passing incident only in the life of the universe, and expressing the hope that in the future life they may find room for serving others through acts of suffering and sacrifice. This morbid view is perhaps due to an old leaven of asceticism working in the minds of these teachers. The view at least finds no support in the Word of God. The great tribulation leaves no scar or tear-stain upon the ransomed universe. The description reaches completeness in this exquisite and compre-

hensive promise. We can imagine a man placed under sunlit skies, breathing the exhilarating air of a new-created world, looking forth upon domains of unshadowed beauty, secure against privation and distress, welcomed into rare and gladdening fellowships, and yet sighing at some plaintive memory of the past, or chilled by the uprising of a bygone trouble. But these final words from the lips of the elder leave no room for such forebodings. In winning and gentle friendship God comes to each spirit of the redeemed from amongst men, and sweetens every hidden spring of bitterness and distress. We may be tempted to think that there are tragic and haunting memories which will steal into the high and holy place. Some griefs are so vast and mysterious that they threaten to make us pensive amidst the angels. It is difficult to see how some distresses can be obliterated, for no finite ministry can conjure them into oblivion. But the things impossible to the uttermost human sympathy and gentleness are possible to God. When God puts His hand upon the fountain of mortal tears, the fountain is sealed up for ever. A translated beggar was not permitted to allay the pangs of a former patron; but God Himself shall dry the tears from the faces of His faithful people. That is a work He reserves for His own right hand. The authoritative end of all sadness shall come through His direct and personal ministry to the soul.

Living conscious, personal relations with God and His Son Jesus Christ form the substance and groundwork of these great truths concerning the life of glory. Our views of heaven are vague, inadequate, mere working hypotheses, because we set ourselves to realise what it is through the beautiful things which appeal to the senses rather than through its spiritual fellowships. It will be nobler and more helpful for us to think of the after-life as a state of relationship to God and to Jesus Christ, differing only by its more vivid and intimate character from that into which we are introduced in the kingdom of God upon earth.

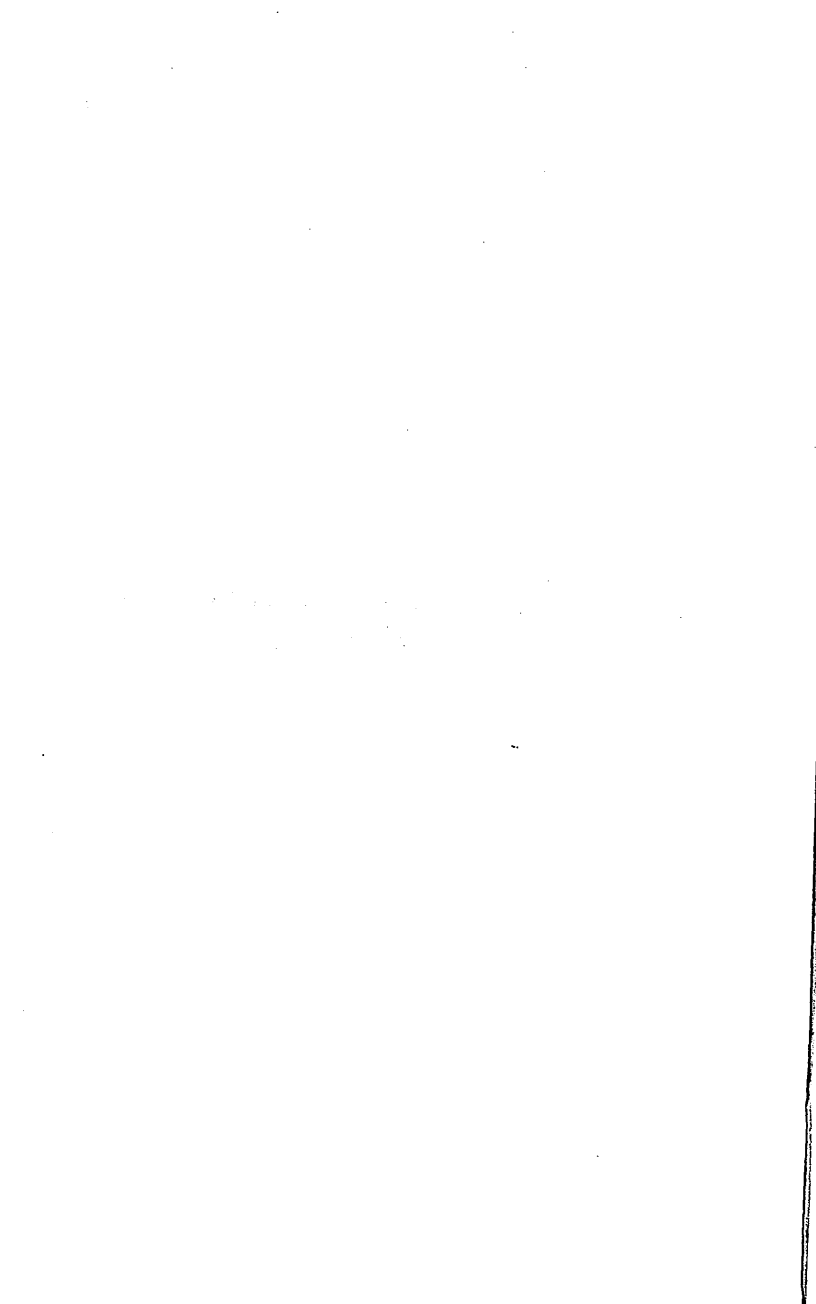
In this holy vision we find the true mean between two sets of extreme and inadequate views which have been current in the Churches. Our views of heaven are sometimes stultified by childish literality, and the hope of eternal glory is brought into partial contempt. It is a rude and prosaic adherence to the letter which has given a certain colour of truth to the sneer of the sceptic, who affirms that when the Bible writers were addressing a nation of peasant-farmers they painted heaven as a new Canaan of corn and wine, fountains and glowing flowers; and when they were addressing a nation accustomed to the civilisations of cities they painted heaven as an enchanted metropolis with walls of jasper and gates of gold. A tender little book, much read some years ago, describes the state of glory in colours

drawn entirely from the world of our own century, and makes it a petted child's Paradise. Musical people are to be entertained with pianos, and mechanical people by the kind of machinery in which they find their hobbies. This grotesqueness brings its reaction, and then a new fashion sets in of describing heaven in the language of abstract thought. A metaphysician might perhaps be drawn to it, or he might not. It is a dreamy attenuation. Its activities and enjoyments are so remote from our present experience that we cannot feel their spell. It was probably under the influence of such impalpable views that the late Professor Newman wrote, "A future life is to me only a reverential augury and an edifying speculation. Forty years ago, when apparently near death, I had not the slightest desire to go to heaven." Mr. Frederic Harrison has said, "The whole set of positive thought compels us to believe that it is an infinite apathy to which your heaven would consign us, without objects, without relations, without change, without growth, without action, an absolute nothingness, a Nirvana of impotence." This allegation forgets such views as are presented in this priceless paragraph in the Apocalypse, or reads them in the letter which killeth. The heaven of our sacred writers is neither a palace of enchantment filled with gay toys and ingenious machinery on the one hand, nor is it a realm of vague impersonal abstrac-

tions on the other, appealing faintly to the sophist and the philosopher and to no one else. Its very essence is relationship, growth, activity, service. They are before the throne, and serve God in His temple. The Lamb is their Shepherd, and God Himself their Eternal Friend and Comforter. Let us rest upon these elemental truths till the fuller knowledge comes to us, and let us hush our repining hearts by calling to mind that it is into such a realm those have passed whose presence we now miss from our homes and our daily haunts.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

BY REV. GEO. MILLIGAN, B.D.



THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

“Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.”—
HEB. xii. 1.

AS he writes these words, the author of this Epistle sees before him a great amphitheatre, in which, according to ancient practice, games were wont to be held. Down below is the arena, or race-course, in which the competitors are already preparing for the contest, casting from them everything that may hinder their free running, and turning their eyes eagerly towards the distant goal; while on either side rise the crowded benches, on which sit the judge and the countless rows of “witnesses” encircling the runners as with a cloud. And as he thinks of how the presence of these spectators stimulates the competitors below, the writer is reminded that he and his fellow-Christians are encompassed by a similar “cloud of witnesses” in the race to which they are called. He has already enumerated some of them in the preceding chapter, that great roll-call of the saints and heroes of the Old Covenant who have by faith borne their testimony to God, and are now entered on their rest.

And now he calls upon the Hebrew Christians, who, as we know from other parts of his Epistle, were at the time exposed to serious trials, and were in danger of losing heart and hope, to think of these, and look to these, that by their example they may be spurred on to fresh efforts, and at length along with them reach the goal.

Nor is the same encouragement wanting to us. We, too, are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses"—not merely the faithful of long past ages, but the saints of God in every period of the Church's history. Ay! God's people whom we ourselves have known, who have fought a good fight and kept the faith, and who, now that the struggle for them is over, are looking down upon us, are calling us, are cheering us on, that with them through faith and patience we may inherit the promises.

It is a thought, I cannot help feeling, that is not nearly so present to our minds as it ought to be. When once our loved ones are taken from our bodily sight, are we never apt to think of them only as a cherished memory, or to look forward to some dim and distant future when we shall meet again, instead of realising that in a very real and true sense they are with us still? They are not dead, but alive. The mortal, the earthly part of them, the shell in which their spirits were encaged, may be buried in the dark earth; but their spirits, themselves that is, the personal independent exist-

ences by which they lived and loved here upon earth, they still survive: they are surviving now, encompassing us, in the figure of our text, as by a great encircling cloud.

Upon the present state of these heavenly witnesses, upon the activities in which they are engaged, and the capacities they possess for further growth in knowledge and holiness, countless questions may be asked, to which it is very difficult to find satisfactory answers. At the same time we must not let the mysteries that surround the truth blind us to the main truth itself—the living presence and sympathy of our departed brothers and sisters in Christ, the communion of heart and spirit which we may still enjoy with those who have passed within the veil. “We are,” says our writer—not “we shall be,” but “we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses”; and again, a few verses further down in the same chapter, “Ye are come . . . to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven . . . and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

“One family in Christ we dwell,
One Church, above, beneath.”

If this be so, and this communion of—this sharing a common life with—the saints is an accepted fact, there is surely no one but must recognise what a direct and vital meaning it has for us all.

I

Thus, in the first place, how clearly it reminds us that goodness is possible, and is within the reach of all.

Just think of it again. You and I have a life to live, a race to run, which is beset with many difficulties, many temptations, many sorrows. It is not, it cannot be, easy. And there may even come times when we are almost inclined to abandon the attempt in despair. But when we remember that this life has been lived, this race been run, by countless others, who have not lived and run in vain, is there no encouragement for us to press forward with fresh zeal and hope?

You know what pride in his family often does for a man, and how the very name he bears stirs him up to prove himself worthy of it. And shall membership in the one Church of Christ, communion not only with our fellow-strugglers here, but with those who are already victors in the race, do less for us?

Our belief in human nature is often sorely tried. When we hear of wickedness triumphant in high places, when we read the stories of crime and fraud and lust which occupy so much of our daily Press, when we find ourselves disappointed with those of whom we had expected better things,—above all, when we look into our own hearts and discover the evil passions, the pride, the selfishness, the bitterness which are continually raging there,—does it never

seem to us as if holiness and purity and truth were only a dream? When we are so tempted, let us turn away from the thought of evil altogether to the lowly, self-sacrificing, loving lives we ourselves have known, and which are now speaking to us from the unseen world. They are God's true witnesses: they show us what He intended all men to be, and what by His all-prevailing grace we ourselves may yet be. They

"Strengthen the wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march,
On, to the bound of the waste,
On, to the City of God."

II

They do so; and here we pass to a second thought, because their very presence with us is a continual call to lift up our hearts, and not to allow ourselves to become wholly engrossed in the things of this world.

We know what a real danger that is. "The world is too much with us." The struggle to live, the engrossing cares of business, the excitements of pleasure,—all these, perfectly right and natural as in their own place they are, tend, if we are not continually on our guard, to turn our thoughts down instead of up, and to blind us to our spiritual and eternal destiny. John Bunyan has drawn the character for us in one of his immortal pictures—the man that could look no way but downwards,

with a muck-rake in his hand, and, standing over his head, an angelic being with a celestial crown in his hand and proffering him that crown for the muck-rake: "but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor." Who does not pity the man? Who does not recognise the folly of his conduct? And yet how common it is! How ready we are to fall into the same error!

If nothing else will rouse us, may not the thought of our unseen witnesses do so? They supply us with the standard, not of earth, but of heaven, by which all our actions should be measured. They form for us the "public opinion" by which our whole lives should be ruled. Think of them when you are inclined to be worldly and selfish and sinful, and ask how such and such an action will appear in their eyes. And just as some little child sets before him the example of some older brother or sister, and in his own childish way tries to copy it, so be ye "followers," or rather "imitators," of them, even as they also are of Christ (compare 1 Cor. xi. 1).

III

And in doing so be assured—and here is our third thought—of their never-failing sympathy and love.

If, as we have already seen, the personal identity of those who have gone before is not destroyed, if

they are still themselves, who can doubt that they still watch over us and pray for us, as they did upon earth, only with a love ever deeper and purer and stronger? Do you ask for proof? I am content to base it on a single fact. We believe—do we not?—that our dead are now with Christ, and therefore that they are entering ever more fully into His mind and spirit. But if so, and if, as we are taught, Christ can still be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. iv. 15), and is still pleading for us with an all-prevailing intercession before God (compare Heb. vii. 25), what more certain than that His people are engaged in the same great ministry of love? They have not, they cannot have, forgotten us. And, now that they themselves are delivered from the snares of the world, the flesh, and the devil, they plead for us that our faith fail not.

“They,”

asks the poet—

“whose course on earth is o’er,
Think they of their brethren more?
They before the throne who bow,
Feel they for their brethren now?”

“Yea,”

he answers; and our hearts tell us that he is right—

“the dead in Christ have still
Part in all our joy and ill;
Keeping all our steps in view,
Guiding them, it may be, too.

One in all we seek or shun,
 One, because our Lord is one,
 One in heart, and one in love,
 We below and they above."

IV

"One, because our Lord is one,"—in that assurance, lastly, lies the true, the ultimate ground of this living communion. We rise up through His people to our Lord Himself: we look beyond them to Him who is "the author and finisher of our faith."

One of the grandest of old Greek myths tells us how on stated days human souls follow in the train of the gods, and, rising above the world, gaze on the eternal and the absolute. It is only by strenuous effort that they can gain for a brief space this vision, and then they fall to earth again, and their life on earth corresponds with the range and clearness of the heavenly impressions they retain.

"For us," says a modern theological writer¹ who recalls the story, "the revelation of Christ has made this dream a truth. In Him we see perfect sacrifice, perfect truth, perfect wisdom, perfect love; and, having seen it, we can discern signs of His Presence in them who show His gifts. He gives unity, and they reveal to us His fulness. In our kinship with them we welcome the pledges of a life which is beyond time. . . . We 'see the light and whence it flows,' the light which is life eternal; and the Com-

¹ Westcott, *The Historic Faith*, p. 261.

munion of Saints with its manifold supplies of strength, with its boundless wealth of promise, becomes a fact of immediate experience."

May it be so indeed with us. May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that, having the eyes of our heart enlightened, we may know "what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph. i. 18).

JONAH AND ST. PAUL: TWO
VIEWS OF DEATH

BY THE VERY REV. PRINCIPAL ALEX. STEWART, D.D.

JONAH AND ST. PAUL: TWO VIEWS OF DEATH

"It is better for me to die than to live."—JONAH iv. 3, 8.

"Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."—PHIL. i. 23.

THE contrast is a very striking one between the Jewish prophet, Jonah, and the Christian apostle, St. Paul. They may well stand as types of the two dispensations. It is not so much the *prophet* as the *man* in Jonah that is interesting; and, so regarded, he is a fit representative of the Law, good in itself, but hedged round and hindered by a law of the flesh warring against the law of the mind; while St. Paul represents the gospel, powerful to save and to renew, able to overcome all hindrances, and to fill the soul with the freedom and joyousness of a newborn life. Jonah is the slave of the letter, the bearer of a message, the purpose of which he did not understand, and with the mercy underlying which he had no sympathy; St. Paul is the free man of the Spirit, dealing with the truth as a son with the affairs of his Father's house, and entering with the intelligent sympathy of a son into

his Father's designs of love. Yet they were both entrusted with a Divine mission; both were Jews sent to Gentile lands; and both preached with a powerful earnestness, which in each case was followed by immediate and widespread results. This superficial resemblance, however, only incites us to inquire into the causes of that deep-rooted difference of which we are no less sensible.

In the words composing the text the difference is illustrated with vivid distinctness. The great fact of Death is the touchstone of human character. How do men look upon it, how do they bear themselves with regard to it? The frivolous may forget it, the worldly may ignore it, the selfish may fear it, the sceptical may defy it, but the thoughtful must at least be solemnised by it. From the face of most men its approach, or the vivid realisation of it, tears away the mask and reveals them for what they are. It exposes the hollowness of hypocritical pretence, it makes the cowardly and distrustful tremble; as a fire it purifies and manifests the faithful, the noble, and the truly brave. Then, if ever, are laid bare the roots of a man's life, and it is seen round what rock they have twined themselves, or through what shifting sands they have been vainly dispersed.

Here, then, we have this touchstone applied to the characters of Jonah and St. Paul. We behold them in contact with the thought of Death, contemplating it, even desiring it. The words they use are strikingly

similar, but the sentiments which inspire them are wide as the poles asunder. "Therefore now, O Lord," prays Jonah, "take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." "As always, so now also," is the confident hope of the apostle, "Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But what if my living in the flesh shall bear fruit by my labour?¹ What I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." "It is better for me to die than to live." "To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Let us note first, then, who gave utterance to these words; and, next, their application to ourselves.

I

**The spirit and attitude of prophet and apostle
respectively.**

The history of the prophet Jonah is a familiar one. It is no part of our present purpose to discuss the vexed question of history *versus* parable or legend, or the miraculous elements which have drawn to the narrative the attention of all and the

¹ Lightfoot's rendering of this difficult clause seems preferable even to that of the Revised Version.

cavils of some. Apart from all such questions, it must be admitted that few books in the Old Testament teach more forcibly wherein true morality and religion lie, or present more clearly the merciful character of God. It shows that even thus early the thought had occurred that the privileges of the Jewish people were not for itself alone; that it was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles; that it had a mission to the nations around. The eye of God rested upon Nineveh, a mighty city, then in the zenith of its power. But it was sunk in pride and worldliness, and in all the vices which, even to this day, amidst all the light and advantages of Christian civilisation, too often make our cities a blot and a pollution in the land. As once upon Sodom and Gomorrah, with their abounding wickedness, the destroying fires of heaven descended, so over Nineveh a cloud of wrath was gathering. But a day of merciful warning was appointed it. A Jewish prophet was selected for the great but hazardous service of venturing alone into the streets of the proud city and proclaiming its approaching doom. He sought to escape the task. But the stormy wind found him out on the voyage to Tarshish, and the fatal lot revealed him as the great offender in the ship's little company, and the great fish that lay in wait for him fulfilled its appointed work, and left him sorrowful and repentant upon the shore. Once again the voice came to him which bade him go to

Nineveh and foretell its fate. So at length there rang through the great city the ominous cry: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." We read of the dismay of king and people—dismay followed by repentance, and repentance followed by remission of the sentence which had been passed upon them. "God repented Him of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." It was upon this that Jonah's anger was kindled, in consequence of this that he breathed the desire that his life might be taken from him. Because he anticipated this, and not because he shrank from the perils of his mission, he had sought to flee unto Tarshish. He knew "that God was gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repented Him of the evil"; and if this grace and mercy should be exhibited towards Nineveh, he feared lest upon him should fall the reproach of being a false prophet. From his point of view, the clemency of God was not mercy but weakness. He himself was by the act defrauded of his prophetic honour, and that among a people who had few opportunities of hearing prophecies or of observing their fulfilment. He who had cast upon him this dishonour, as he deemed it, might take also his life. Life was valueless to him, if it was only to be employed on fruitless errands, if he was to live branded with the reproach of falsehood. He arrived, we may hope, at a better state of mind when God

showed him the narrow selfishness of his feeling by the acted parable of the gourd, which came up in a night and perished in a night, but for the loss of which he lamented more than he had done over the possible destruction of a populous city. It was when the prospect of life under a sense of failure and discomfiture seemed too much for him to bear, that he bitterly cried: "Take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah's view of Death was, then, simply that of an escape from the burdens of life. His petition was an utterance of despair. To the weak, to the sorrowful, to the sinful, the same dark thought is a frequent visitant. With an eye turned upon life, its disappointments, its cares, its troublesome responsibilities, — "it were better to die" is not seldom the thought that rises in the heart, even if not uttered by the lips. Death, we think, can surely bring nothing worse than we are already enduring, and the grave seems at least a place of rest. To Jonah, and to all who think as he, there is not necessarily anything about Death which makes it attractive, save only that it is the cessation of life, and of that in life which makes life intolerable. Death is a dark abyss into which the eye cannot penetrate, but into which a man is willing to cast himself as an escape from the light which has become to him a terror and a misery. He is eager to fly from the ills he knows, in the vague hope that

those he knows not of may prove more easy to endure. Jonah's cry was not that of a man in love with Death and what Death could bring to him, but of a man sick of life, and desiring at any cost to be rid of it. It was not even David's prayer: "Let me now fall into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man." It breathed distrust, not trust, of God; displeasure at, not confidence in, His mercy. Weary of the responsibility of action, Jonah desired to lay it down for ever.

How different is the view which the expression of St. Paul reveals: "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." To him also death was an object, not of dread, but of desire; yet not because life was so evil. To him "to live was Christ"; he lived only to serve Him, to commune with Him. He had no conception of life apart from Christ: "I live," he elsewhere says, "yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me." His Christian activity was to him a source of gladness; he was like the war-horse, stirred by the sound of the trumpet, and impatient for the battle; he did not shrink from it, he was eager for it, wherever there was evil to be overcome, or earnest work to be done. To fight the good fight, to run his course, to keep the faith,—could life be despised which afforded scope and opportunity for activities

like these? There was but one thing in which life was lacking, and, in that, Death was gain. It was possible, it seemed, to be closer to Christ, to attain a more perfect state of union with Him. Here he saw through a glass darkly, but then he would see face to face; here he knew only in part, but then he would know even as also he was known. Not, therefore, because the eye was fixed sadly on the past, but because it was turned hopefully to the future, did he pronounce it "far better" to depart. Death was not to him a blank darkness, it was no mere refuge from the ills of life. It was the entrance to joys unspeakable, such as eye had never seen and mind had never conceived. It was filled, not with the dark shadows of fear, not even with the dim radiance of hope, but with blessed certainties, with the light of the presence of Christ, with the endless glories of a life with God. Therefore he rapturously looks upon it, not as a relentless foe taking from him the light of the eyes and the joys of feeling and action, but as a friend coming to usher him into the nearer presence of the Saviour, to make perfect the life of communion after which he has so long been striving, but which the conditions of his present existence hinder from being fully realised. It was a passage, not from existence to nothingness, but from one sphere of activity and enjoyment to another infinitely more glorious.

It is often cast as a reproach upon the teaching of

Christianity as to another world, that, by fixing the thoughts and hopes of men upon a future life, its tendency, or at least its frequent result, is to render them less careful and useful in this life. It is urged that it would be better if every thought were busied, and every energy occupied, in striving to make the present life better, nobler, and happier. But it may fairly be asked how far the attainment of this very desirable object would be secured by abandonment of the Christian standpoint. Which of the two views of Death and of what comes after Death—that of Jonah or that of St. Paul—seems more likely in itself to form and to inspire a noble and a useful character, and has been shown by experience to have this result? See Jonah, unreasonably jealous for the honour of his prophetic office, willing to sacrifice a whole city lest a stain should come upon its reputation; could he have attached so much importance to so small a thing had he ever looked upon it in the light of another world, and understood that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal? How little did he know of Divine love, who did not, beholding the repentance which made the chastisement no longer necessary, rather rejoice in the failure of his prediction and the withdrawal of God's destroying hand! How little was he filled with a true reverence for God, and a real desire for His glory, who would not rather that God should be

magnified by an exhibition of His love and forgiveness, than that the honour of the prophet should be vindicated by an outpouring of Divine wrath ! It was the same absence of a large-hearted benevolence, the same irreverent, distrustful, selfish spirit that made him cry, "Take my life from me ; it is better for me to die than to live." He folds his hands in listlessness, because he works for self, not for love ; and that is not the way of God. He is displeased and angry, because the thoughts of the Most High are not confined to the narrow channel of his own. It would surely have been different with him had he had but the vision of eternity, and of Him by whom it is inhabited. His estimate of the Ninevites' repentance would have been changed, and it would not have seemed so small a thing to save so many souls. It would have been worth living, even under reproach, if he knew that he suffered for righteousness' sake, and that mercy might be exalted upon earth. He would not have breathed so lightly the solemn wish to die had he regarded Death as the transition to a state of joyful communion with a living God and Saviour, of which they only should be found worthy who have faithfully laboured here.

What we miss in the prophet we find in the apostle. The opening up of that other state of being had given to every human soul a new value in his eyes. For him there was no fleeing to Tarshish

when he thought of Rome, the Nineveh of the age in which he lived—"I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." For him there was no undue exaltation of his office. "Some, indeed, preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will . . . notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." For himself he asked no consideration—he was despised, defamed, scourged, stoned; he bore without repining, he even rejoiced in bearing, the reproach of Christ. "I die daily," he said. For the apostle entered, as the prophet did not, into God's purpose of love. He had seen God in the face of Christ, and knew that He loved the world. By that love he himself had been won, and now he was an ambassador for God. There was nothing forced in the proclamation of his message as in that of Jonah, in which the stern eloquence of the prophet seemed born of his recent experience of God's power and of God's terrible earnestness. St. Paul believed, and therefore spoke; he lent himself with all the ardour of his nature to the accomplishment of a design sprung from eternity and ripening for eternity; for he knew that the crown of righteousness, which was his own highest reward, was prepared, not for him alone but for all who loved his Lord's appearing. Hence, however great his desire to depart and be with Christ, he remembered those whom God had com-

mitted to him—"Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." It was because he had the clearest view and the firmest conviction of what Death would bring to him, that he understood most fully what life required of him; because Death could introduce him to his reward and to a world of joy, that he was untrammelled by any earthly or selfish consideration, and willing to devote his life the more unreservedly to the fulfilment of his Lord's will and the furtherance of his fellows' good.

II

The lesson which these examples impress upon us.

In no age of the world, brethren, have men been free from the prophet's temptation, in none have they outgrown the need for the apostle's faith.

There is a feeling of weariness under the burdens and cares of life which is eminently natural, and to which, apart from religious and moral considerations, there is no counterpoise save the equally natural shrinking from dissolution. It becomes, therefore, a matter of importance whether Death is regarded mainly as a refuge when life becomes too hard to be longer borne, or as a departure¹ for our Father's house, the house of many mansions, whither our Lord is gone, and whence He will come again to receive us to Himself, that where He is, there we

¹ The word used signifies the breaking up of an encampment.

may be also. Does the view which we entertain of Death, and its relation to the present, lead us to set undue value upon the things of earth, make us self-seeking and inconsiderate of others? or does it free us from evil ambitions, make us large-hearted and generous, willing to lose ourselves if we may gain others, content to fill a little space if only God be glorified? We may be sure that the right manner of regarding Death is that in which St. Paul viewed it, as the hour of triumph terminating a life of work. We may be sure that the pessimism which restricts our outlook, which regards existence as evil, and condemns our highest hopes as the most fraudulent of illusions,—whatever it may do for a few specially constituted individuals, can never be a creed by which the masses of men can live. Its tendency is to dull the vital energies, to sap our strength, to make even earthly objects and relations less worthy in our eyes. Across the ideals of humanity it writes, “Vanity and vexation of spirit.” Yet what would man be without his ideals? The Christian thought of immortality, it has been proved by countless instances, so far from withdrawing effort and sympathy from this life, fills it with a meaning which makes it more attractive, and quickens, in regard to it, our love and labour. To live or die is not in our hands,—but, says the apostle, “we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.” So to live in Christ that Death to us would

be a welcome gain—so to die in Christ that in dying we may have finished our course,—to do both *joyfully*, not so set on the world that we cannot leave it, not so forgetful of our duty to Him who has placed us in it, and who would through our efforts win it for Himself, that we cannot live in it,—such should be the aim and attitude of Christian service. Leaving our times and seasons in our Father's hand, seeking His strength for what we may have to do and to endure, and His love as our constant portion, we shall never be so overborne by despair as to cry petulantly with Jonah—"It is better for me to die than to live"; but, with the greatest of the apostles, we shall be willing to live and work as long as God appoints it for us, while conscious that "to depart, and to be with Christ," would be to us also "far better."

LAW, SIN, AND DEATH
By REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

LAW, SIN, AND DEATH

"The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I COR. xv. 56, 57.

WE are accustomed to hear these words read on the most solemn occasions of life. They usually form part of the sad service which is the last service that we can render to each other. They are associated, therefore, with melancholy scenes and distressful memories, and we do not often recall them and repeat them at other times. I think, indeed, that we are half afraid to mention the great and terrible realities of which they speak. Death, sin, and law,—that grim trinity of mortal facts which everyone has to face, and in one way or another deal with,—we have well-nigh banished them from our pulpit discourses and from our sanctuary thoughts. Yet we can only leave them out by shutting our eyes to one half the contents of the New Testament. We meet them at every turn in the Epistles of St. Paul—Sin, law, and death. They run through the whole texture of his thoughts like the dark threads of a piece of tapestry—now showing

on the surface, and now hidden by brighter colours, but woven in unbroken continuity throughout. They form a sort of background, indeed, to his triumphant thoughts concerning Christ and Christ's redeeming power. He represents them as man's cruel and terrible inheritance, as the nightmare upon the human heart and conscience, as the chains which hold him in bondage and fear; and then he pictures the strong Son of God, immortal love mightier than these things, coming to undo the chains and scatter the terrors and bring deliverance. And ever and anon we get a grand burst of exultant song like this: Death, sin, and the law: yes, they are dread facts. "But thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now hear what the apostle says on this great theme.

I

It is sin that makes death terrible.

"The sting of death is sin." We are all in a measure afraid of it. We call it the king of terrors; we call it the last enemy; we call it the great imperial tragedy. We try to forget it, but the endeavour is vain. Its ghostly presence haunts us more or less in all the walks of life. We run away from it, only to feel that it is following us. We refuse to talk about it—some of us shrink from naming it, as if to name it would bring the thing

upon us. We refer to it by all sorts of indirect and roundabout expressions—perhaps you do not thank me for speaking about it now. It gives a sort of creeping sensation. Why bring this thing out to darken the sunny gladness of the bright morning? Why not talk of life and its joys and hopes, instead of death with its gloom and mystery? Or, in other words, we are cowards, and dare not look into the face of this thing; and the cause of the cowardice is written here. It is sin that makes us nervous and fearful. The sting of death is sin. I do not say, nor does the apostle mean, that there is no bitterness at all in death save that which the sense of guilt brings. He means that the keenest torture of death, its poison, venom, sting, is found in the fact of sin. There are other things in death from which every man shrinks, even the bravest. We are appalled by the awful mystery of it; we dread the great unknown into which it plunges us; we dread the melting away and dissolution of the body which has been our only dwelling-place; we dread the going out naked, unable to comprehend how we can exist at all without this tabernacle, finding it impossible to conjecture what that other house not made with hands will be; we dread the change, the going out alone on the strange path which our feet have never trodden before, the quitting of the familiar scenes, the separation from friends, the long farewell, and the breaking up of all life's ordinary in-

terests,—all these things make the most courageous heart tremble as he contemplates the inevitable fact. Yet all these things together do not invest death with so much awfulness as the single fact of sin. “The sting of death is sin.” It is the guilty heart and the troubled conscience that clothe the last enemy with the garments of horror. The torturing remembrance of secret and open misdoings, of a wasted and misspent life; the fear that in that unknown world the deeds done in the flesh will follow us, and that there we shall have to confront an all-knowing judge; nay, the very doubt of immortality which sin suggests,—all these things make the chief bitterness and dread of dying. “The sting of death is sin.” We read that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned.” Does it mean that if we had known no sin we should have known no death, that we should have lived for ever upon this earth, and been spared what we call the final trial? No, it cannot mean that. Death is part of our very constitution; the body we live in was made for a temporary residence. If there had been no sin, that would have dissolved when it had served its purpose. It means that sin made death what it is to us—gave it its dread power and torture; and that if we had known no guilt we should have faced it, and passed through it without fear—perhaps welcoming it as a weary man welcomes sleep. The one

man who never had the least touch of fear concerning death was the man who never knew sin, the Divine man, our blessed Lord and Master. He rarely called it death. He gave that name to another thing—soul corruption, blindness of heart, stubborn unbelief, sensuality, selfishness, torpid emotions: these were death. What we call by that name He called sleep, or going to the Father. He spoke of it with the utmost calmness. He almost smiled at men's fears of it. He wondered they should make so much ado about it. He could not understand its terrors; for Him it had no terrors. For sin had no place in Him, and "the sting of death is sin." It is the burdened conscience that makes the deep darkness of death. If we had no guilt, we should almost be as sure of a future life as we are sure of our present existence. The best lives hold with firmest hand the truth of immortality. It is the evil in us that makes us shiver with a sense of uncertainty. It is the accusing conscience that whispers, What if there should be nothing after this? The men who live nearest to God rarely hear that whisper. St. Paul never heard it. The man who of all men followed Christ with closest steps was the man who had the largest share in his Master's cheerful thoughts about death. He feared it not. He held fast the crown which it would bring. Absent from the body, present with the Lord. To me to live is Christ, to die is gain. I have a desire

to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Christ had enabled him in a large measure to conquer sin, and that had given him the victory over death. "The sting of death is sin." What is it that makes a deathbed sad and a funeral gloomy? You will tell me, doubtless, fifty things—all those things which I named a moment ago. Yes, but they are all insignificant compared with the one fact—sin. You follow a man to his grave whose life has been throughout unworthy—a life of immoral doings, coarse and vulgar aims—without faith, prayer, or the least striving after better things. That funeral is melancholy, if you please. Vain are the words of consolation and hope. In vain do you talk of resurrection and life. The sentences fall like dull clay upon the coffin. They have no meaning. "The sting of death is sin." But bury a man who has walked with God, whose life has been lived in faith and honest endeavour, who has kept himself unspotted from the world and left memories of fruitful and Christlike service, and there is no gloom then. There is pathetic sorrow and kindly regret, but no bitterness. There is even a sunshiny feeling that all is well. The glory of hope shines around the grave. The angel of peace is there. It is a sweet mystery, but not dreadful at all. No, because "the sting of death is sin."

II

Now this second thought, that the torturing power of sin is given by the law.

“The strength of sin is the law.” The apostle does not mean here simply the Jewish law,—the law embodied in Old Testament precepts and commandments,—but that larger moral law of God which is written everywhere—that solemn, “thou shalt not” and “thou shalt,” which we hear continually in every speech and language, which is written in nature and history and all the books we read, which is stamped upon our very constitution and engraven on our heart of hearts. We cannot get away from it without getting away from ourselves. Our consciences bear perpetual witness of this all-pervading law of God which we have a hundred times set at nought and violated. There is in us all the dread sense of duty, of what we ought to be and are not, of what we ought to do and do not. There is in all of us the struggle between the higher and imperative voice, which says, Thus shalt thou live; and the lower voice, which says, I cannot and will not—a struggle in which the better part is again and again worsted. And that makes the torturing power of sin. “The strength of sin is the law.” If we knew no law there would be no sin, or at least no consciousness of it. It is because we know so well that we feel so weak, and so humiliated, and so self-

condemned. It is because we are enlightened that we are made ashamed. It is because God has written His law in our hearts that the torment of sin works in our bones. It is because we have the conviction of duty—that Divine endowment—that we groan under the burden of duty violated and right things left undone. Our very dignity makes our shame. If we were like the brute beasts, knowing no law, like them we should be free from remorse, regret, and fear of a judgment to come. It is because God's law never ceases to speak to us that we have the sense of sin. It is because He will not let us alone that we feel the pain of it. And, alas! the law which makes the strength of sin does not deliver us from it. It only checks, restrains, galls, chafes, and humbles; the law never helps us to gain the victory, it only reveals to us and emphasises our defeat. It seems rather to triumph over our weakness, and makes us cry out: "When I would do good, evil is present with me. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Truly "the sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." These are the facts of which all our hearts testify; and now let us finish as St. Paul does with the crowning fact, the sweet everlasting promise and assurance—

III

Of the Victory.

“Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” What is this victory? We can win a sort of victory over the law by violating it and trampling upon it so often and so constantly that we despise it, cease to regard it, and are hardly more troubled by it than if it were a dead thing. There are men who do that. We can almost kill the sense of sin by incessant practice in the thing, by choking conscience and stifling the voice of God within us. There are men who are so dead in trespasses and sins, that, like dead men, they do not feel the torture of the thing at all. Yes; and we may win a sort of victory over death by rooting out of our hearts the very instinct and hope of immortality. There are men who meet death with hearts of stone, who have no more fear of the future than if they were stone, because they have worked themselves up into the conviction that nothing whatever comes after. Sad and dismal victories are these.

You know the victory which Christ gives. I trust you will all know it by blessed experience as St. Paul knew it. First, it is the lifting up of the awful weight of sin—the lightening and removal of all life’s guilty and oppressive memories at the feet of a forgiving Father; the deliverance which comes from the Cross; the sweet, glad word of acceptance and

pardon, which, like a burst of morning sunlight, sweeps all the vapours and darkness of our night away. Then it is the bringing of the awful dreaded law into harmony with our will, or our will into harmony with the law. We can do it through Him who strengtheneth us. If we do it not completely now, we shall do it more and more ; for we learn to love it, as we learn to love everything which is of God. And the very power of Christ is in us to crown our endeavours with success.

And, lastly, it is the clearing of all doubt. Christ gives us victory over death because He conquered it ; because the path which He trod, though it led through a grave, was shining with heaven's light all the way ; because where He is on the other side there is nothing to be seen but glory. He helps us to think of death as He thought of it. "I go to My Father and your Father. And where I am, there also shall My servants be." The law is no more a terror to conscience. The strength of sin yields to a mightier force. The sting of death is gone from it. "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

BY REV. J. A. CLAPPERTON, M.A.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"—NUM. xxiii. 10.

THIS prayer was uttered by Balaam some fifteen hundred years before Christ was born. The prophet was among the mountain-peaks of Moab, and before him lay a deeply impressive scene. In the far distance in front of him were the hills of Ephraim and Judah, with numerous openings that gave glimpses of fertile plains and smiling valleys. Still nearer him was the plain through which the sacred Jordan rolled—a plain some six or seven miles broad. Immediately below him lay the eastern hillside, covered in part by a long belt of acacia groves. Among these groves he could see thousands of tents belonging to the Hebrew wanderers—the chosen of the Lord. In vain had he striven to draw down the displeasure of the Almighty upon them, and, now that he thought of their special religious knowledge and spiritual advantages, he regarded them as "righteous," and felt constrained to give sincere utterance to his deepest wish:

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

This prayer is full of powerful suggestion, and particularly so because of three facts—(1) its universality; (2) its modern strength; (3) its ancient weakness.

I

Its Universality.

It would be felt to be a prayer universally applicable, were it not for one doubt. Those who have read their Bibles carefully, remember the teaching of St. Paul (Rom. iii. 10 and 23): "There is none righteous; no, not one. . . . All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God!"

It is quite true that Balaam would feel no such difficulty. To him it was quite sufficient to be able to believe that some of the Jews conscientiously lived up to the rich heritage of truth they had received. That was sufficient to constitute them "righteous" in his view. But still the difficulty remains, that if we know that nobody is righteous the prayer becomes an empty mockery.

But St. Paul himself supplies a cheering reply to this problem in the very chapter from which we have quoted (Rom. iii. 20-22): "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested;

. . . even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto ALL and upon ALL them that believe." John Wesley puts the matter very plainly in his twentieth sermon: "*Inherent righteousness is not the ground of our acceptance with God, but the fruit of it, and is therefore not identical with the imputed righteousness of Christ, but is consequent upon it.*"

Seeing, then, that thousands of Christians have believed in Christ, and have had the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, in that sense they are genuinely "righteous," and in view of their eternal prospects this prayer can be uttered by all men with reason and earnestness.

II

Its modern Strength.

The pagan prophet, Balaam, envied the prospects of the dying Hebrews; but when we consider the blessedness of those who die "IN THE LORD," we feel that his old prayer is truer than ever. The earliest recorded example is that of St. Stephen. At his trial his enemies gnashed upon him with their teeth, but his Friend in heaven brought instant help. Not a band of armed deliverers or any miraculous deliverance. No, but a glimpse within the veil, so reviving and engrossing that he forgot all about the glances of hate and threatening

hands with which he was surrounded, and he exclaimed in gladsome wonder, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." He saw his Saviour standing as if to see better what was going on upon the earth; looking down with sympathy and love. They rushed upon him, hurried him to the place of execution, and stoned him to death. But as the cruel flints battered his body he called out in love, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down, and gave one last thought to his implacable foes. He cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," and "fell asleep." What a triumph of love! Not a murmur; not a syllable of anger; but love for Christ and love for the murderers. As we think of that opening of the roll of Christian martyrs, of the gentle heroism of the saint, his forgiving love, his abundant entrance into the kingdom of peace, we can hardly help repeating the prayer of Balaam: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Such triumphs have not been confined to ancient times, or to the pages of Scripture. Glorious instances abound in later ages, and in all classes of society. One example that represents hundreds may be related. A minister of the gospel died at the early age of thirty-seven. Some days before the end, his wife asked him how he was, and he replied that he felt very ill, "but unspeakably happy

in my dear Lord Jesus." The last day he lived, his wife repeated the familiar lines from Dr. Watts—

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are."

The dying man replied, "Yes, He can. HE DOES. I feel it."

In private family-histories that have never appeared in print, numberless instances of similar glorious ends are treasured up by surviving friends. Many of my hearers will have heard of some of these. Two such incidents have been reported on very good authority.

A good Christian lady was dying of erysipelas. On the last day of her life the delirium had passed, and she spoke quite calmly to her younger sister. They had been left as orphans years before, and had left their native land. When the father died, he had left the younger in the charge of the elder. Her charge, one might have thought, was ended. But she said, No. In her heart she felt a stronger love than ever for her sister, she told her, and she believed that when she died she would still be able to watch over her and guide her. As she was speaking, something seemed to stick in her throat. Her sister tried to remove it, but it was in vain. It was the coming of the end. She suddenly exclaimed, "Look! Jesus!" and in a moment her spirit was gone.

A venerable friend of these two young ladies had a somewhat similar experience. She was no musician, although she could enjoy the simple tunes of early Methodism. But when she was on the very point of dying she called her daughter to her and said, "Oh, Charlotte, do you not hear the music?" And with those sweet sounds ringing in her ears she closed her aged eyes and died. No one else could hear the music. But the Shepherd of Love often fills the mind of His dying saints with such heavenly music or ravishing visions. The instances that could be cited are almost beyond number.

And what does it all mean? It means that it is a blessed thing to belong to the number of Christ's "righteous" ones, and that to this day He fulfils the glorious message delivered to St. John: "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, BLESSED are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. xiv. 13). For by the New Testament revelation we are taught that not only are Christ's children blessed in the very hour and article of death, but that after death they stand "before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. . . . The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev.

vii. 15-17). And as we contemplate their joy and the path of triumph by which Christ leads them to it, we cannot but exclaim, "Let *me* die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

III

But there is one solemn side of this subject that must not be forgotten.

The author of this memorable prayer did not die the death of the righteous, but by his own deliberate choice he died fighting *against* the righteous. How weak was his prayer!

No doubt, when he first uttered the prayer it was sincere. He really wished that he might die with the hopes that the righteous have. His feelings were lofty; his desires were, for the moment, pure. But, when worldly gain was offered him, he thought it too much to sacrifice earthly rewards for the sake of living as an obedient follower of Jehovah. He *declined to join himself to the people of God, and was lost.*

How tragic was his end! He found himself powerless to draw down curses upon the chosen people. He therefore endeavoured to ruin them by introducing idolatry and flagrant immoralities among them. He was partly successful, but he perished by his sin. Eventually, Moses and Eleazar took vengeance upon the tempting nation,

Moab, and, in the fierce battle that ensued, this wretched prophet was slain (Num. xxxi. 8). He who had prayed that he might die the death of the righteous, *died as their enemy and corrupter*.

Is our wish to be as fruitless? We should like to die the death of the righteous. Is that longing to go for nothing, as it did in the case of Balaam? If not, we must remember that God is not mocked, but that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. If we will join God's people and live a true Christian life, then, like St. Paul, we shall find it Christ to live, and gain to die. May God help us all so to live. Amen.

THE ARK AND ITS NEW
SANCTUARY

BY REV. THOMAS G. SELBY

THE ARK AND ITS NEW SANCTUARY

“And there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant.”
—REV. xi. 19.

THIS inscrutable book, it has been said, was the work of a Christian writer of the second or third century, who took a Jewish composition as his groundwork and adapted it to the use of his contemporaries by hints and applications of his own. The late Dr. Martineau gave the support of his name to this fantastic attempt of some recent German theologians to analyse the book into its original parts. The book, it must be admitted, has many Jewish characteristics in its texture. The chapter before us illustrates this peculiarity, for, after Jerusalem has been destroyed and its citizens dispersed to the ends of the known world, temple, golden altar, and ark reappear. But is it not sufficient to remember that John's personality was made up of two halves, Jewish and Christian, and that in old age, when early training revives and reasserts itself, he set himself to reconcile the two halves of his personality by showing how all that was Divine

and inspired in the past would at length be found to have incorporated itself into the new kingdom of God? The mind even of an inspired writer may be a parchment upon which both the old and the new are written. If William Blake had been trained in a Jewish home and had afterwards been moved by the Spirit of Christ to spiritualise some of the deep and indelible impressions of his youth, he would have given us pictures of the scenes in heaven like those presented in the Apocalypse. The truths set forth in these celestial interludes have much in common with the Epistle to the Hebrews. The one writer, however, had a wider outlook upon the world, and conceived things after the manner of the seer; whilst the other was a plain interpreter of the institutions of the past.

It is a curious fact that this central symbol of the Old Testament worship should have suddenly thrust itself into view in the midst of these sacred visions. Jerusalem and its famous temple had been blotted out from the life of the world. Echoes of its destruction seem to linger in the successive scenes of the apocalyptic history. The old sacred and mysterious chest of acacia-thorn had not been heard of for centuries. Jeremiah is the only prophet who alludes to it. It disappeared with the destruction of the first temple, and the silence of the prophets is perhaps explained by the fact that it would be a pain to the devout and patriotic Jew to

speaking of the glory that a second time departed from the life of the elect when the ark of God was again taken. Was it carried as a trophy to Babylon along with the gold and silver vessels of the temple, and did the king use it as a chest for his treasures? Or was it claimed as his share of the loot by one of the conquering generals, and turned into a wardrobe for the silks and embroideries of his favourite wife? Or was it consumed in the flames that reduced Solomon's temple to ashes, and did some soldier enrich himself by picking up the fused lumps of gold from the débris? Or did the jealous and faithful priests carry it off into one of the secret passages that honeycombed the temple-rock, and did their own bodies moulder by the side of the sacred relic it was their work to guard? We cannot tell. It had vanished for centuries, and the Jews were too reverent to replace it by a mere copy.

But now this exiled disciple, who fifty years ago had renounced many of the traditions of his forefathers, sees it in his inspired dreams, or perhaps rather sees the pattern once shown to Moses in the mount. The strange symbol rises into view midway between the sounding of the trumpets and the pouring out of the vials. Perhaps the scene in which it presents itself is a prologue to the conflict between the woman and the dragon. But it is not necessary to have a fixed historic theory for the interpretation of this perplexing book to see its

significance. The truths of which the ark was the old-world witness are the centre of all movement in heaven and on earth. It is a cause upon which God has put the stamp of His authority, which is being fought out amongst men, and upper and lower worlds react upon each other in the sublime drama. The apparent failures, defeats, and humiliations of the Church in its bygone epochs will be retrieved, and the sacred things lost from its life on earth will be found in heaven. The yearnings which come back to us from cruder stages of our religious training will be satisfied, and in the things that God is making ready for those who love Him the instincts of the earlier and the later self will alike be met.

It is a much easier thing to see what this feature in the vision means than to correlate it to historical interpretations of the successive scenes of the book. Two thoughts are unmistakable. The ark in heaven implies that the worship of God had gathered round a new centre, and the presence of the ark in the upper sanctuary is the pledge of Victory and Eternal Salvation to God's servants.

I

This vision of the ark in heaven suggests that the worship of God is henceforth to direct itself towards a new centre.

Under the old dispensation the ark was a witness to the root-principles of true worship. It contained

within itself the mementoes of those facts and truths from which the Covenant tie between God and His people was woven, and which must ever be kept in mind by those who would enjoy fellowship with God.

A golden pot was placed within the ark, which once contained a handful of the wilderness manna. It was put there to remind the thoughtful worshipper of the care God had shown for the wandering forefathers of his race, and as a pledge of the providence which should always be round about the steps of the faithful. Men needed to be taught that they lived by God's word, and that in every age it is God's food which keeps them alive in the wilderness. The Covenant God of the chosen people still went before them, to spread their table and sustain their lives no less surely than He sustained the children of the Exodus. And this token of the providence that for forty years had never failed their forefathers, was meant to assert God's authority over every successive generation of worshippers. He who feeds must command, and the bread of the obedient could not be lacking. That which was kept within the ark demanded unwearying loyalty to the living God who makes men live. Avarice and the brood of vices springing from it are sure to be rife where there is no faith in the providential decree which gives to us life and breath and all things. The ark was a witness to the truth which finds its golden expression in one of the Psalms: "Trust in the Lord

and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." The memory of His unfailing bounty must never die, for the thought of it vivified the sense of obligation in the worshipper.

Within the ark was also placed the almond-rod, which suddenly bloomed in the nighttime to show that God had chosen Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, and that the choice admitted no dispute or challenge. The idea of mediation was at the basis of all Jewish worship. Its ritual was distinct from the rituals which do not recognise the need of mediation, or choose the mediator by expediency and arbitrary rule. Men need a priesthood, and God Himself must elect and authorise that priesthood according to His own counsels. All other priesthoods are futile and barren. The right to choose is His alone, and, when the deathless priest arises, there can be no successor or substitute. The ark of the Covenant contained the credentials of the priests who were to minister before it.

The two tables of the law were also kept within this sacred chest. There could be no abiding covenant between God and man if the obligations inscribed on those two slabs of stone were forgotten or despised. The elements of all duty are permanent in the midst of change ; and, whilst heaven and earth may pass, not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail. These memorials within the ark distinguished the observances paid there from all other

religious rituals. Neither reverence nor morality are considered vital in the service of many heathen gods. In some countries, thieves, harlots, and gamblers have their patron deities. Famous idols are worshipped as freely by the corrupt as by the upright, and the homage only hardens in wrong-doing. The tables of the law, hidden within the ark of the inner sanctuary, imply that God communes with His people from above the mercy-seat upon a basis of truth, righteousness, reverence, and charity; and the communion is specious which does not harmonise with God's holy law. In bowing before the Lord Jehovah, men must bow to His unchanging precepts.

These would be the thoughts suggested to the mind of a reflective Jew as he looked towards the thick curtains which hid this sacred chest from view, and to the mind of the high priest as he ventured before the ark on the Day of Atonement. And these ideas associated with the ark must have been present in the mind of the seer when he saw the opened temple in heaven, and this old symbol before the throne.

The foundation truths of the ancient Covenant are vindicated through all the unfoldings of human history and confessed in the worship of the ages. Manifold and mysterious ministries proceed from God's presence to direct and shape the destinies of the world. Plague, battle, famine, and earthquake overtake the nations as angels from before the altar

pass hither and thither to their appointed tasks. In allegories not always easy to understand, the great issues between good and evil, truth and error, are contested. Portents fill the heavens, and the earth quivers in the throes of disaster and revolution. And yet in this tragic and inscrutable turmoil God vindicates ancient principles, and makes them the motive forces of a nobler worship. The Divine presence still hovers over the ark, and upholds the verities of which it is the witness. His providence encircles those servants upon whom His seal has been put; and He who screened His people from the plagues of Egypt and fed them in the wilderness with angels' food, defends and cherishes their successors amidst the evils which scourge the world for its debaucheries and corrupted religions. In the days of famine they are satisfied. Amidst the great world-changes God leads men to recognise the priest whom He Himself has ordained, and to confess his power to bring men nigh. Where the ark is there the high priest stands, and the virtue of his mediation is asserted by the fact that the ark is no longer behind a veil, but in the open temple. The sanctuary on high is filled with the lightning which flashed and the thunders which rolled over Sinai of old, and the Divine law is thus binding itself upon the conscience of the nations, and fitting men everywhere for the higher worship of the new heavens and earth. The great events John saw in vision

were designed to vindicate and vivify the foundation principles of man's fellowship with God. Those principles never pass out of the thought of God and the angels who wait before His face. In the open temple of heaven the ark of the Covenant is seen.

This vision implies that the worship of a humanity regenerated by the discipline of judgment will find its centre and resting-place in the self-same principles which were foreshadowed by the ordinances of the first tabernacle. The proclamation by great voices in heaven, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ," herald a new and better theocracy; and as the ark of the Covenant was the keystone of the old, so are the truths illustrated by its emblems essentials of the new. God met His people aforetime and took away their transgressions at the mercy-seat, which, with its crowning cherubim of gold, was fitted upon the top of the ark. Here the radiant cloud once hovered, which was the sign of God's presence in the congregation of His people. Here the conscience burdened with fear and unhappiness found rest. Here, in times of perplexity and bewilderment, God made known His will to those who sought Him. All Jewish worship looked towards the ark. The ark was fashioned to symbolise spiritual realities, and John's vision authenticated both type and substance. It had not been finally submerged like the landmark of an unmeaning and perishable error. The verities

of which it was the memorial were established for ever in the heavens, and all nations should pay homage before them. The larger religion which was coming to rule men involved no negation of the inspired past. Jesus came to fulfil and not to destroy, and His kingdom, centring itself in this symbol of the old religion, is seen to repair every breach, to beautify every desolation, and to expand every hope and promise of bygone history. The Covenant rainbow comes from the old world of storm and arches itself about the throne; the first generations of the Covenant people are represented by twelve of the twenty-four elders about the throne; and this ark, which contained the credentials of the Covenant made with the children of the Exodus, having vanished from the view for centuries, finds for itself a resting-place in the new city of God, the Mount Zion which is above. Every holy and glorious thing that has gone into the darkness has its resurrection and finds its long-lost home in a new shrine of worship. History is so ruled by Him who sits upon the throne, that it gathers up into its millennial climax every forgotten treasure and sanctity of the world's religious childhood.

This glimpse of an ark in the celestial temple suggests that the new centre of worship is *catholic and not national*. It was not without pain and distress that this sacred writer heard news of the destruction of Jerusalem and the holy and beautiful

house he had so often visited, and mused upon the revolutions these judgments foreshadowed. But he was made to feel that these changes, far from being fatal to the best interests of religion, should broaden its basis and perfect the life of the Church. The worship of humanity no longer turns to an ark shut off from the larger world by the mountains of Moab, the sandy defiles of Arabia, or the Mediterranean Sea. Worship no longer turns to the walls and battlements of the city of David, where had once stood this jealously guarded chest of acacia-thorn. For the rank and file of the nations such a centre was far below the horizon line. The Philistines might tremble before it as before some mysterious power which had set itself implacably against their fortunes; and the Queen of Sheba might be drawn by some happy accident within the spell of this localised worship; and the exiled Jew, morning, evening, and at noontide, might turn with devout sigh towards the vacant place once hallowed by the presence of the ark. But for the seething masses of the nations this centre of worship was out of view, and if the discovery of it had come to them it would have been despised as a rallying point of pride and racial assumption. No form of worship centralised on earth can be universal. It was a blessing to mankind that the ark, after fulfilling its first purpose, passed away, and the city which had once enshrined it was overthrown. The ark was no longer hidden

by grey hills, wide deserts, frowning walls, and jealous curtains, which were a challenge rather than an invitation to surrounding nations. It had been denationalised and lifted above all geographical horizons. And the process was to be carried further, and every new metropolis of the faith, so far at least as it became a stronghold of exclusive assumption, must be abolished before Christianity could become a world-wide religion. It is discredited when it is put under a special flag. John seemed to see the rallying point of worship on the meridian line of the universe in full sight of all the nations. The angels made this new ark of the Covenant the basis of their outgoings, and around it gathered the assembly and Church of the firstborn. This spiritual mercy-seat, the substance of the old shadow, the pattern which Moses had seen in the mount, was the fountain from which all the streams of seen and unseen life took their rise and passed forth to their ministries. Here was no shrine for the ministry of a caste, no tabernacle for one race only, no audience-chamber for the king of a realm, little more than provincial in its scale; but a mercy-seat for all upon whom the sun could shine, a rallying point for men of every nation, kindred, and tongue. In presence of that centre, God was bringing into Covenant bonds and fellowship all the life which His breath had quickened.

The vision seems to indicate *the growing religious capacity of the race*. The new centre of worship is

unspeakably nobler than the old, and brings the elect people of the last times into more sacred relationship with God. The innermost mysteries of the holy place are illuminated and made accessible to every member of the redeemed commonwealth. It is perhaps a surprise to the reader of this book that the ark in heaven becomes visible in the thick of the stormful histories here described. We could have understood it better in the beginning or at the end when the final picture of the city of God is painted. We should have found less difficulty in explaining this visualised allegory if it had been presented to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, for such a feature would have been in harmony with the special lines of thought there worked out. That Epistle reminds us how the veil was rent in Christ's flesh, and the true mercy-seat established in the presence of God on high. At the first glance we do not see why this old-world emblem should be introduced into a scene in heaven spaced between scenes in the after-history of mankind upon earth. But is not the arrangement of the thought intelligible and suggestive? Whilst God fixed the centre of worship and reconciliation in heaven when He exalted His Son to be the immortal High Priest of the race, it is only when the instructive and admonitory tribulations of man's earthly lot have brought him to right views that he finds his reconciliation where God has centred it. John implies in this vision that all worship will at last pour itself

forth where God has fixed the true mercy-seat, and the places on earth accounted holy will be left behind by the soaring faith of the believer. It is at God's throne itself, and before no earthly symbol of it, that the devout and the faithful will have fellowship with the Covenant God. God once came down to men, stooping by type and by visible sign to His worshippers. But now the process is reversed, and in his larger and more perfectly disciplined life the worshipper ascends to God. The infantile dimness and infirmity are outgrown, and the believing spirit rises into a world which is a standing theophany. The centre to which the redeemed races of men shall converge is a house not made with hands. The ideal of man's Covenant relationship with his Maker achieves itself in a sphere of finer and more exalted experience. "And there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant." It is there that the mediation is accomplished, and that is the goal towards which our faith must stretch itself. Let us beware of all movements which would bring the centre of devotion and fellowship back to earth again.

II

The Covenant ark in heaven is the pledge of victory and external salvation to the chosen people.

The old ark taught by its historic associations as well as by the ethical message of its contents.

When this, restored and venerated, flashed its light upon John from the celestial heights, he would call to mind how the powers of nature and the armed forces of the foe had alike confessed the resistless spell of that presence to which it was a testimony. The turbulent waters separating the wandering and defenceless Israelites from the land of promise divided as it came into view. "What ailed thee, O thou Jordan, that thou fleddest; and thou sea, that thou wast driven back?" Walled cities tottered as this token was carried by believing priests round the frowning battlements of the Canaanites. When the Levites lifted the staves of this chest, which contained the credentials of Covenant privilege, upon their shoulders they sang, "Let God arise; let His enemies be scattered"; and the prayer was answered, for the armies of the aliens fled apace, and the threatening adversaries were put to confusion. The very idols bowed before it and were broken, whilst their votaries were aghast with dismay. And yet, when the custodians of it failed in fidelity, its efficacy waned, and it failed to prove itself the unfailing warrant of victory. More than once it passed into captivity, because it was carried forth in support of a cause from which God had withdrawn His favour and treated as a mere fetich. Though it had preceded the Israelites in their march of conquest as the promised land fell like ripe fruit into their lap, it proved an empty charm in the cause of

an impenitent people, and at last passed completely out of view, as a sign that the Covenant had been fatally broken by its beneficiaries.

It is as the earnest of a surer victory to a more faithful people that this sacred and time-honoured symbol reappears in the book of the Apocalypse. In these Patmos allegories the forces of nature seem to league themselves against the saints. Stars grow pale and fall from their appointed orbits. Seas, rivers, and fountains change to blood. Battle, famine, and plague run riot through the world. Beast, Dragon, and False Prophet strive with the Church, whilst the blood of the saints is poured out like water. And yet all these things work out the victory of God's servants, for the ark is in the open temple. It can never more be the lost token of a discredited enterprise. No new captivity can overwhelm it. It is lodged in the temple of heaven, and legions of angels, whom God makes His messengers, are round about it. The idols shall be abased in its presence. When the patience of the saints is proved, the last stronghold of error and oppression shall crumble, and its adversaries vanish like smoke. As it glitters there before the view of the seer, it is a pledge that the kingdoms of this world shall be conquered as completely as was Canaan of old, and the faithful servants of the ark shall be crowned and shall sit on thrones.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, "A man must

feel himself a child of fortune if he is to brace his soul to fortitude." That cynical and godless man had probably ceased to feel himself a pet of the Fates when he began to blunder, and brought about, in due time, his own irretrievable overthrow. In presence of the ark of God's Covenant in the ever-open temple, the servant of Jesus Christ may always realise that a resistless providence is on his side, and that he can suffer no final defeat.

The Covenant ark in heaven is *a landmark of the inheritance which God has promised to them that love Him*. When the first ark, borne by the priests through the depths of the Jordan, had once touched the soil of the promised land, the possession of their inheritance by the chosen people was sure. The dividing floods could no longer overwhelm the meanest member of the sacramental host. Leagued kings could not bar access to the soil promised to the wandering forefathers of the race. The consecrating touch of the sacred symbol asserted possession for all who kept the laws it enshrined, trusted in the providence of which it was a memorial, and worshipped through the priesthood whose credentials it preserved. Its progress marked a triumphant pathway for the children of faithful Abraham in their ranks and tribes and families.

The ark of the Covenant seen by John precedes the pilgrim saints into the new land of promise, and asserts their birthright in "the city whose builder

and maker is God." It puts the patriarchs in possession of that better country which they never found on earth. If we are servants of the Covenant, and in accord with its demands, it is already claiming our inheritance for us. The symbolic ark has been carried amidst exulting songs into its last resting-place. It has passed into the realms of light, and, in view of the one Church in heaven and on earth, waits there till the last weary fainting warrior, the last pale footsore woman, the last halting child, has crossed the flood, and every jot and tittle of the Covenant promise has been fulfilled. It has made a safe pathway for our departed friends, and it will lead us, as it has led them, into realms of eternal peace. The terrors with which our imagination has sometimes peopled the unknown and shadowy realm will be dispersed before its presence. After our fierce wilderness battles and our troubled wanderings, it will create for us an atmosphere of serenity and blessedness, sweeter than that with which it filled the house of Obed-edom. The sacred peace under the wings of the cherubim will diffuse itself through the new heavens and the new earth. The saved nations, in their reunited tongues, kindreds, and families, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The scenes within which the new life of heaven finds its setting are as baffling to the imagination as the life-dramas of other planets, but it is enough to know that this reconstituted symbol pledges to us a nobler rest and a more

munificent inheritance than God's people of old either knew or conceived. The ark is in the heavenly temple, and it has there asserted for us and for a worshipping universe the celestial birthright. The ark implies a great high priest, and this vision or allegory runs up into the same truth as the passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which tells us that "our hope entereth into that which is within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered." The inheritance is claimed for us by all the symbols of the old Covenant, and by a royal priest and kinsman whose plea cannot be set aside.

In the last scene of these holy visions, when the golden city appears, temple and Covenant ark have alike passed out of sight. The Divine faithfulness is vindicated before all the universe. Every past promise has been redeemed. God Himself is the temple. God Himself is the light. He is all in all to those upon whose minds and hearts the Covenant laws have been written. Every lost treasure is found again in God, and human blessedness attains its highest consummation. Let us be faithful, and in life and death hold fast to the Covenant which He never forgets or annuls.

SORROW FOR DEPARTED FRIENDS

BY REV. PRINCIPAL D. ROWLANDS, B.A.

SORROW FOR DEPARTED FRIENDS

"Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more."—ACTS xx. 38.

HUMAN life is a very strange medley; it is made up of the most discordant elements: light and shade, mirth and sorrow, pleasure and pain, are always found together, each contributing its quota to the variegated whole. This accounts for the fact that there are scarcely two persons in the world whose opinions of life exactly coincide; for each individual is prone to judge life from his own general experience, or perhaps from his experience at a certain limited period. Upon the whole, however, I think that mankind, as a rule, take a more desponding view of life than facts seem to warrant. The complaints so often put forward by fretful and disconsolate spirits have no valid foundation. No one has a right to speak of misery, grief, and woe as if these alone were the stuff that life is made of. On the contrary, sober reflection would show that happiness is the predominant element. But as the mariner remembers every feature of the solitary islet which he passed on his voyage, while

he retains not a single impression of the ever-changing aspects of the great ocean which daily met his gaze ; so, in our survey of life, its griefs and sorrows stand out in bold relief, whilst its joys and pleasures are well-nigh imperceptible.

In the context we have an event of very frequent occurrence—an event which brings before us the gloomy side of life in a very impressive manner. Friends who loved each other with all their hearts were about to separate for the last time. During the remainder of their pilgrimage they had not the slightest hope of meeting again. True, they might live in each other's memory ; but the very remembrance of the many hours of delightful companionship and mutual comfort they had spent together, would only serve to intensify the dreariness of their future existence. Paul must have keenly felt the bitterness of the situation ; for with all his mental strength and moral greatness he possessed a tender and affectionate nature. His farewell address to his dejected comrades shows the sincere interest he had always taken in their welfare, and his ardent desire for their spiritual progress. He spoke to them as a father to his children, referring in touching terms to his past endeavours on their behalf, and exhorting them to persevere in the course of conduct which they had commenced under his direction. And we can easily imagine how eagerly they devoured every word that fell from his lips,

knowing that this was the last time they should hear his voice.

This world may be properly designated as a world of partings. As it was in the days of Paul, so it is now. That sweet verse which most of us learned to lisp in childhood, contains a truth which we realise more and more every day: "Here we meet to part again." Even the most prolonged friendships—such as extend over many years—must eventually be terminated by death. It was this solemn fact that led the poet to say—

"Friend after friend departs;
Who has not lost a friend?
There is no union here of hearts,
That finds not here an end."

Many thoughts are suggested by the text, upon which time will not permit us to dwell. I shall simply refer to a few which seem to be the most instructive and profitable.

I

The removal of Christian friends is a public loss.

In whatever way a true, sincere, honest Christian is removed, whether by death or otherwise, the locality which he leaves suffers an incalculable loss. It is not merely a loss to the Church of which he is a member, or to the friends with whom he is associated, but to the community at large—even to

the godless and profane. You say when a good man is taken away, "It will be a great loss to the Church." A loss to the Church? Doubtless. But why speak of the Church alone? The loss to the Church is really a very insignificant part of the whole. The loss to the world, whose moral and spiritual welfare he endeavours to advance, is inconceivably more serious.

What do we lose in the removal of good men?

1. We lose the benefit of their religious zeal.

The religious institutions of our land are by far the most important, whether we consider their influence upon the present life or their relation to the life to come. This realm owes its greatness, its power, its glory, and whatever good it contains, to the various spiritual agencies which for centuries have flourished within it. I am aware that some affirm that, with our commerce, learning, and other civilising forces, we might have well done without our Christianity—nay, some even maintain that our Christianity is a positive detriment to our material well-being. But I should like to know the time when, and place where, a nation has enjoyed the highest prosperity apart from the light of Divine revelation. I should like to be shown that strangely favoured community where graces have flourished and virtues have abounded, but which has owned no allegiance to the King of kings. Where is such

a country to be found? When has such a nation existed? Ask the magnificent empires of antiquity, and they will say, "It is not in us." Ask the heathen kingdoms of the present day, and they will say, "It is not in us." It is nowhere, in fact, and for the simple reason that it cannot possibly exist. But grant the supreme importance of religion, then religious zeal is what the world can least afford to dispense with. You cannot carry on religious work by any other means. You may have religion by law established—you may have religion patronised by the wealth, the rank, and the learning of the country; but if it be not supported by the zeal of those who profess it, it will become a lifeless form, or, if it have life at all, it will work for evil and not for good. On the other hand, you may have religion opposed by kings and legislators—you may have religion attacked by every worldly power; but if its adherents have a holy, living, burning zeal, it will most assuredly overcome every attempt to retard its progress. Do you require proofs? They abound on every hand; they are furnished by the history of nations as well as that of individual Churches. Do not we ourselves know of plenty of cases in point? The Church, maybe, was wealthy, strong, and respectable; but religious zeal was extinct among its members; and the consequence was that it fell into decay. Or the Church, maybe, was poor, weak, and persecuted; but, through the unflagging zeal of its members, it

carried all before it. We have sometimes watched with wonderment the mighty work accomplished by one zealous Christian; which seemed to justify us in saying that zeal, like faith, is able to remove mountains. The removal, therefore, of one whose heart glows with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men is a public loss.

2. We lose the benefit of their counsels.

The two endowments necessary to qualify a man to give wholesome counsels, are an enlightened understanding and a sanctified heart. And of the two I believe that the latter is the more important. All honour to brilliant parts, and that wisdom which is acquired by diligent reading and profound meditation,—these are priceless talents, and can be turned to the highest account; nevertheless, if the man who possesses them be a corrupt character, I will not go to him for counsel. It is high time that the glorification of mere intellect, however splendid, should cease, and that men should learn to appreciate more accurately the value of moral excellence. Give me the man who has a pure, simple, honest heart; who is “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”; who pursues truth for its own sake, and cultivates virtue for the love of it. It is just possible that many who are wise in their own esteem may despise him for his ignorance, and pity him for his lack of culture; nevertheless, when difficult situations, de-

manding more than ordinary discretion, present themselves, his heart instinctively impels him to choose what is right and do what is best. Such a man is a temple of the Holy Spirit; the love of God, which is shed abroad in his heart, leads him to all wisdom. When you meet a man like this, you may consult him in your perplexities and rely upon his advice. Such a man lives not to himself, but to exhort, instruct, and guide those around him. Many a careless one is awakened by his seasonable rebukes and warnings; many a broken-hearted one is comforted by his words of hope and encouragement. When such a one, therefore, is removed, the loss is inestimable.

3. We lose the benefit of their example.

The words and deeds of a genuine Christian are not only precious in themselves, but also on account of the influence they exert upon the world; in other words, a Christian does as much good by his unconscious example as he does by his voluntary efforts. A man lives in a certain neighbourhood, whose soul is imbued with righteous principles; he sets before him a high standard of moral conduct; he applies himself with diligence to help the poor, to teach the erring, and to heal the afflicted. Many are they who praise him for his goodness, and recount with admiration his manifold labours of love. But there is one item which is seldom taken into

account — one particular which is nearly always overlooked. You cannot measure the good which that man does by the time which he spends, or the labour which he bestows, or the money which he employs in various schemes of usefulness;—no, for the probability is that his example is followed by others, whose efforts taken together are much greater than his own. We generally value the sun, because that in his daily circuit of the heavens he pours down a flood of light and heat upon the earth, enabling man and beast to follow their occupations, and Nature to deck herself in robes of beauty. But this is not all the service that the sun renders us; there is another consideration which we are prone to forget. For when the sun has disappeared in the west, and the shades of night have closed around us, and the din of labour has been hushed into silence, the light of the moon and the planets still cheers the wanderer homeward bent. And why? It is because the sun even now shines upon them, and they reflect his rays upon the earth. Even thus the brightness of a holy life is reflected by other lives, which are brought within the sphere of its influence. I believe that Christianity owes more of its marvellous success to the potency of Christian example than is generally supposed. “The blood of the martyrs” has been “the seed of the Church.” How? Because their heroic firmness in meeting their doom, and their unflinching loyalty to con-

science and truth, inspired others with an ardent desire to tread in their footsteps. The sublime fidelity of Paul as a Christian teacher, and his gigantic labours for the spread of the gospel, have kindled in thousands of souls a similar holy enthusiasm. Nor should we forget in this connection the man Christ Jesus Himself, who left us an example that we should follow Him; and whose glorious life in this respect is the life of the world. And we bless God that in a world like this—a world defaced by the terrible ravages of sin—there are yet men who, in respect of their pure example, are “the salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” But in proportion to the value of their example is the greatness of the loss when they are removed.

II

The main reason of our sorrow at the removal of Christian friends is that they will never return.

Such was the case in the incident before us: “Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, *that they should see his face no more.*” This was probably the only cause of the copious tears which they shed; every other consideration, when compared with this, seemed as nothing. They might have thought of the *loss* they would sustain through his continued absence; the loss of his weighty counsels, the loss of his stimulating teach-

ing, the loss of his encouraging speech; but all these things they seemed at the moment to forget by reason of the grief they suffered in losing himself as the object of their affection. It was their deep love for him that made them weep, and not any selfish regard for their own interest. And this is the most touching thing about their sorrow—the only feature that compels our sympathy. Suppose you were to see a man weeping at the grave of his friend, and you were to ask him, Why do you weep? and he were to answer, A very good reason why; I have lost through his death a considerable sum of money. Would not you feel shocked? Would not you despise the man? Would not you consider him unworthy to be called a friend? But suppose, on the other hand, he were to answer, Why? for the strongest of all reasons; because I loved him as my own soul. Would you not pity the man? Would you not sympathise with him with all your heart? Would you not even feel inclined to mingle your tears with his? Thus, while selfishness deprives sorrow of its sacredness, and makes it a commonplace and even a despicable thing, love, on the contrary, serves to intensify the reverence with which it is always associated.

“Sorrowing most of all . . . that they should see his face no more.” Is there not something peculiarly significant about these words? Do they not suggest a very striking contrast? Can we help thinking of

other cases where the sorrow is of a very different complexion? Friend parts with friend sometimes in this world, sorrowing most of all because he is going to banishment for his crime. Friend parts with friend at other times, sorrowing most of all because he has so frequently been his companion in sin. And friend parts with friend too often in death, sorrowing most of all because he cannot hope that he is saved. Sad partings these, and bitter the sorrow with which they are accompanied! But the friends of Paul had no such sorrow; neither have the friends of a departing or departed Christian: with reference to him they have every reason to rejoice; they can only grieve on their own account, and that simply because they "shall see his face no more."

III

There are circumstances connected with the removal of Christian friends of a most consoling nature.

We sorrow because we shall see them no more in this life; but there our sorrow ends; the rest is joy, delight, and gladness.

1. They leave an honoured memory behind them.

As a rule, they are more highly esteemed in the world after their death than while they lived; the imperfections which adhered to their characters during life have disappeared, and nothing remains

save the dazzling splendour of their virtues. When one of England's greatest statesmen went to his rest, he was spoken of the following evening, in the House of Commons, by one of his greatest antagonists, in these terms: "There are indeed, I may say, some members of Parliament who, though they may not be present, are still members of this House, are independent of dissolutions, of the caprices of constituencies, and even of the course of time." Now the same thing is true, in a certain sense, of all departed saints, though it is more apparent in some cases than in others. The good they have done lives after them; their memory is embalmed in the hearts of survivors; though dead, they yet speak. There are some connected with this Church—like every other Church—whom we can never think of as altogether absent; though they have passed beyond the veil, they are here still; their perfected spirits seem to join us whenever we bow together at the throne of grace. The very thought of them adds fervour to our prayers and strength to our spiritual aspirations; and thus helps us to serve the Lord with greater diligence and delight.

2. They are gone to a higher sphere.

While in this world they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims; they sought and desired a better country; and now their fondest hopes have

been more than realised. Here they had to struggle with sin and temptation and suffering; but yonder, sin is no more known, temptation has lost its power, and suffering has been for ever abolished. Here, like hapless vessels tossed about by storms and harassed by adverse winds, they were often tempted to complain of the weariness of life; but yonder they enjoy the rest which remains for the people of God. Here they were often in sorrow, often in woe, often in tears; but yonder God has wiped away "all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. . . . And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it: and His servants shall serve Him. . . . And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." The very love we bear them, therefore, forbids us to desire their return to this evil world; we cannot wish them to quit the Crown for the Cross; but we give thanks to God that He has redeemed and saved them, and finally granted them an entrance into His everlasting kingdom.

3. We hope to meet them again.

They are "not lost, but gone before"; and, though they will never return to us, we may go to them. It

is an affecting story, that about the ancient philosopher who stood mourning at the grave of his friend, and as he turned away exclaimed in despair, "Farewell, my friend, for ever!" But we need not cherish a feeling like this in reference to "them that fall asleep"; we need not "sorrow even as others which have no hope"; for we have the blessed assurance that we may join them ere long in the better land. Let this, therefore, be our solace amidst the changes and trials of life,—in view of our many afflictions and constant bereavements,—that in the bright world above we shall meet our friends again, meet them in glory, meet them in immortality, meet them never more to part. When we bewail the loss of a Christian, "sorrowing that we shall see his face no more," the words "no more" refer only to the present world; for in the world to come we may see his face, and enjoy his company, and rejoice with him for ever before the throne of God. Let us therefore hold fast to this hope; let it spur us on to greater activity in our Christian course; let us not be "slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

SYMPATHY

BY THE VERY REV. PRINCIPAL ALEX. STEWART, D.D.

SYMPATHY

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”—ROM. xii. 15.

THIS is one, and not the least important or interesting, of the precepts into which the great exhortation which heads this chapter is expanded. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” And the apostle thereupon proceeds, throughout this and the three succeeding chapters, to exhibit the lines upon which the great dedication may be carried into practice, the salient features of a life which would be made to correspond with the doctrine and example of Christ. For unless a man has the “Spirit of Christ” he is none of His. We must all seek to have in us “the mind that was also found in Him.” No one, brethren, can read the New Testament without perceiving that faith in Christ is but a beginning, and not the end, or the whole; it is a seed which requires to grow; it is an out-

line which needs to be filled up. To believe in Christ, and not exhibit the fruits of that belief in a spirit which, however imperfect, was striving after perfection,—however sinful, was struggling against sin,—was, in the view of the New Testament writers, as impossible, and, if it were possible, would be as incongruous as to gather grapes off thorns and figs off thistles, or for a fountain to send forth at once sweet waters and bitter. On the other hand, we know that the will to do good may be present, but the knowledge may be wanting; guidance may be needed. Look at a child trying to grasp some object of its desire. Again and again it tries and misses, because as yet the muscles of its arm and hand are not completely under the control of the will. It cannot yet calculate direction and distance with sufficient accuracy. But still it is by these unsuccessful trials alone that it can learn, unless its way is smoothed by timely guidance. So, though the spirit of good be planted in a man's heart, he still needs to be taught in what directions this spirit will best find expression and exercise. Much, indeed, a certain moral sensitiveness born of the love of goodness will teach him; but there is much that will be in danger of being overlooked, until a painful experience has taught its value, unless a guiding and helping hand be extended to lead forward the faltering footsteps. This is specially

the case with many of the simpler, not therefore indeed the easier, but the more common, duties of life. There is a tendency, perhaps natural enough, to look for "some great thing to do, some secret thing to know," and the countless ways in which God can be glorified in the everyday life are forgotten and neglected in the exuberance of a newborn zeal. Do not forget, then, that the practical directions of Scripture are worthy of as careful and as patient study as its doctrines or its promises. We require a map and guide-book for a journey quite as much as a motive for undertaking it, or a hope to sustain us under its fatigues.

Now the lesson of the text and of the place it holds among the precepts of this chapter, is that Sympathy is a genuine outcome, an indispensable feature, of the Christian life and character. A Christian without sympathy is like fire without light and heat, a moral impossibility. We say nothing of the *measure* of sympathy of which each individual is capable; that often depends upon the constitution of the individual. Some are deficient in power of imagination; it is difficult for them to realise the experiences, whether joyful or sorrowful, of others; but such persons find the same difficulty in recalling and realising anew their own experiences in the past. Some, again, feel less acutely than others, are less excitable, and are consequently less easily moved, either by their own joys and

sorrows, or those of others. Perhaps the standard of capacity is here in our hand. Do we share the joys and sorrows of others, not perhaps as vividly and intensely as we should feel them were they our own, but as vividly and intensely as a recent similar experience of our own would affect us? But if we have *no* sympathy at all with others, then we are falling short of our duty, we are deficient in the marks of a healthy spiritual life. "Bear ye one another's burdens," said the apostle, "and so fulfil the law of Christ." "He that loveth God," says another apostle, "let him love his brother also."

Sympathy is, indeed, with justice accounted an element of Christian character, for was it not the essence of the life of Christ? What other than sympathy with human need—joy when that sympathy was received and welcomed, sorrow when it was rejected and despised—moved at any time the mind of the Saviour? What else than the deepest, truest sympathy thrilled through every word He spoke, and was the evident spring of every tender and loving deed? Who, though despised of others, found Him inaccessible? From what tale of sorrow did He turn away His ear? From what scene of misery and mortal anguish did He shrink? Only in appearance did He for a time repel the Canaanitish mother whose young daughter was grievously vexed with a devil; only for ends

that were the highest and most merciful did He linger in Peræa while Lazarus was dying, instead of going at once to comfort the weeping sisters of Bethany. For their grief, as well as for His own, He lifted up the voice of lamentation, as it is recorded, "Jesus wept." But not only did He sorrow with the sorrowing, He also rejoiced with the rejoicing. He was the Bridegroom who came, not to make the children of the bridechamber fast, but that they should rejoice in His presence. He turned not coldly and austere aside from scenes of innocent mirth and enjoyment. At Cana He turned the water into wine, and so added to the gladness of the marriage feast. Not He, but the sanctimonious hypocrisy of another protested when His head and feet were anointed with the costly spikenard; He saw, what the other did not, the overflowing love of her heart who made the offering. And these countless acts of sympathy which made His life beautiful, what were they but sparks from the fire which ever burned within His breast—the fire of heavenly love, of which His whole earthly existence was a revelation, which moved Him to give Himself a ransom for many, to die upon the Cross that men might be saved?

It is to His disciples, to those who are called by His name, and who ought to be filled with His Spirit, that it is said, Have *your* hearts in like manner full of sympathy for the joys and woes of

men, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Who, indeed, should give but those who have bountifully received? Who should love but those who have themselves been loved? Who should be ready to exhibit sympathy but those who have needed it, and have received it, and felt its preciousness?

Joy and sorrow: does it not seem as though with these words we named the warp and woof of human life? Is human life not made up of these; do they not chase each other in our experience like the sunlights and shadows across the summer fields? Smiles and tears, gain and loss, gratification and disappointment, rest and weariness, health and sickness, life and death—now climbing the mountains and then descending the valleys, never still, always changeful,—such is the experience of man. And in the midst of such experiences how valuable is human sympathetic fellowship! It may be said that he who has gladness for his portion does not need sympathy, that is, that others should share it with him. Yet how few are the enjoyments from which the sense of loneliness does not take away the brightness, which are not increased and intensified, like a lamp surrounded by mirrors, by the knowledge that others are sharing our joy, that other hearts and bounding pulses are keeping beat for beat with ours! And in the time of sorrow, when the darkness closes around, and we put out a hand in the darkness,

what a help and blessing it is when we feel it grasped by a friendly hand, what a shock were it rudely repelled!

Into this world, then, of human joys and sorrows, Christians are sent as missionaries of help, of comfort, and of peace. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Rejoice with the rejoicing. Many, from a mistaken view of the relation of Christ's gospel to human life, act even under a sense of duty so as to mar rather than to help the joy of those around them. So did not Christ. When they asked Him, Why do Thy disciples not fast? He extended over them the shield of His protection, and answered, "Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the Bridegroom is with them?"

The kingdom of God is joy, as well as love and peace. There are, indeed, pleasures of the world in which the Christian can have no part. He who said, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice," said also, "Be not conformed to this world"; for, he says again, "The fashion of this world passeth away." But the Christian is under no obligation to frown upon the innocent joys of human life, those in which rest and recreation are found, which do not interfere with duty, and do not injure and degrade the character. There are sorrows enough in the world without adding to them unnecessarily. Rather should the Christian be the most sunny of all men.

“Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice.”

Rejoice with the rejoicing. It is not always easy. A heart must be very free from selfishness to do that. The cause of another's joy may be some possession or advantage which we have not, which we have perhaps desired and failed to obtain. There is a seed of envy in most men which rather rejoices in the misfortunes of others, either because they may make capital of them, or simply because they cannot bear to be outstripped. Contentment and submission and the charity which thinketh no evil are surely the conditions of a heartfelt joy in the joys of others.

Rejoice with the rejoicing. Ay, even though your own heart be racked with pain. Forbear to cast a shadow across their cloudless skies. As the Saviour commanded those that fasted to fast in secret, and, when they came forth, to efface all sign of their austerity and humiliation, to anoint the head and wash the face; so is he a Christian hero about whom none can guess what aching sorrow he hides when he goes cheerfully about his daily duties, making his presence felt by the light it diffuses and not by the gloom it spreads, pouring balm into the wounds of one and unselfishly helping the joys of another.

Rejoice with the rejoicing, weep with the weeping. The latter is a duty needing even more to be insisted

on, because more apt to be neglected than the others. It is not everyone who can say with the wise man, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting." Yet happy are they who feel that humanity is a brotherhood of those who rejoice and of those who weep—a brotherhood in which all the wealth of gladness is to be enjoyed together, and all the burdens of sorrow together to be borne. Are we not all members of the body of Christ; and when one member suffers, do not all the members suffer with it? As we conceal our sorrow when we would meet the joyful with glad eyes, so let not our minds run too much on our joys if we would heartily share the grief of another. Nor let any think that, in this fellowship with the grieving, those who sympathise and comfort *give* and do not also *receive*. Nay, they become richer in the joys of the loving heart, richer in the treasures of inward spiritual experience, more happy and contented and stronger to meet the waves of sorrow when they come rolling in upon themselves.

"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." We have as little power to stay the tears as right to mar the joy. "The poor ye have always with you," said Christ; yea, and the grieving, the bowed down, the bereaved. Probably not a moment passes but some heart is made desolate. The tide of sorrow will flow to the end of the world. Often with those who are in affliction we

can do little more than make our sympathy felt; to speak much seems mockery, to attempt to comfort is in vain before the grief that must have way; we can but weep with the weeping. And yet we sorrow not as those who have no hope. For us, for all who will receive it, there is a light behind the veil—a light which gilds the dark cloud and throws a bright rainbow promise across the tears of sorrow. Christ, who died for us, is risen again, and has brought to light a world of joy and gladness “where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,” “and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

THE FUNERAL OF JOSEPH

BY REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D.

THE FUNERAL OF JOSEPH

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”—HEB. xi. 22.

ON the opposite side of the valley near Nablous, where Jacob's Well is situated, about six hundred yards north of it, and near the little modern village of Askar, supposed to be the Biblical Sychar, the traditional tomb of Joseph is pointed out to every visitor. It stands where the south-east corner of Mount Ebal slopes down to the plains, in the midst of very rugged ground. Like all Moslem tombs, it is a simple raised mound of stones about three feet high, rudely plastered all over, and placed in the middle of a square roofless chapel or enclosure with white-washed walls. There is a row of olives and fig-trees beside it, which soften by their shadows the asperity of the spot; and a vine has crept up the north-east angle of the court, and hung its luxuriant foliage over the wall, reminding one irresistibly of the beautiful comparison of Joseph, by his dying father, to a fruitful bough whose branches hang over the wall. This tomb is the

object of reverence to all the religious communities of Palestine; and this common veneration, each sect regarding it as its own property, has prevented it from being disfigured by mosque or temple or church, and preserved it in its primitive simplicity. Like the tomb of his mother Rachel near Bethlehem, the walls of the enclosure and the sides of the tomb itself are covered with numerous modern Hebrew inscriptions and Moslem names, written or scratched on the plaster. And on a stone bench, built into one of the walls, you will see at almost any hour of the day two or three Jews seated, Bible in hand, swaying themselves backwards and forwards as they chant a prayer appropriate to the place.

There seems little reason to doubt the authenticity of this sacred site. Indeed there is hardly any spot in Palestine which claims as this does the tradition of past ages, and the common assent as to its identity of no less than four religions—Samaritan, Jewish, Mahometan, Christian. The enclosure and the tomb are probably not very ancient. An inscription on the south wall in English informs the visitor that it was rebuilt in 1868 by Consul Rogers of Jerusalem, the friend of the Samaritans. There was an attempt made not long ago to excavate the spot by some French archæologists, but the people of Nablous rose up in wrath and prevented it. In accordance with the Egyptian mode of interment, there must have been a cave or excavation in the

rocky ground in which the body of Joseph was laid ; and that excavation must be either under the tomb itself, or somewhere in the near neighbourhood ; and could it be discovered, the mummy of Joseph, whose body we know was embalmed in Egypt, might be found in it. It is a curious thing that there are two short pillars, one at the head and the other at the foot of the tomb, having shallow cup-shaped hollows at their tops, which are blackened with smoke ; for the Jews from time immemorial have been accustomed to burn sacrifices in them, of small articles such as handkerchiefs, gold lace, or bits of shawls. This custom points to a great antiquity. The tomb also has a different orientation from all other tombs in the Holy Land. It is placed diagonally in the enclosure from north-west to south-east, instead of towards Mecca or the rising sun due east ; and this also is a sign of a remote age, long before the time of Mahomet.

It is satisfactory then to think that, in all likelihood, here or hereabouts the embalmed body of Joseph, after its long wanderings, found its final rest. It was buried here and not in Hebron, the ancestral tomb of his fathers, because the land around was Joseph's own property. It had been bought by his father Jacob from the sons of Shechem, and bequeathed as a special legacy to Joseph, on his father's deathbed, as the only possession in the land of promise which the Patriarch owned. Then,

too, the territory in which this parcel of land was situated became afterwards the inheritance of the tribe of Ephraim, the descendants of his own son. The scenes in the neighbourhood were associated with the last incidents in the life of Joseph, before he left his native land for ever. It was at Dothan when a young shepherd lad that he wandered in search of his brethren, at his father's request; it was there that he was put by them into a pit, and then taken out and sold to the Midianite caravan, which carried him blindfold past his father's green valley and deep well, past his mother's grave, and the home at Hebron which he had left a short time previously, down to Egypt, where he fulfilled his wonderful destiny. It was natural, then, that he should wish to be laid at last in his own property, in the midst of scenes and associations that were so dear to his heart. And no more suitable place could be found, for it is the very fairest spot in all the land of Canaan, the true physical centre of Palestine, towards which all the features of the country converge. It is the oldest site of religious worship in the land, and both on natural and historical grounds must take precedence of every other locality. There at the foot of the everlasting hills, with the magnificent territories of his son Ephraim around him, have lain for ages the last relics of him who was the founder of the national existence of Israel, as Abraham was the founder of its religious

existence ; who was the means, through the education and discipline of Egypt, of converting a wandering shepherd race into a great nation, that has influenced all the ages more than any other, and over whom his proud and grateful father pronounced the glorious benediction on his dying bed : " The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills ; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren."

I gazed across from Jacob's Well upon the spot, irradiated by the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, with a deep thrill at my heart, as I tried to recall the well-known events in the life of one who, had he chosen, might have been buried on the green banks of the Nile, beside the great Pyramids of Egypt, instead of in this quiet obscure spot among the Canaanite hills. But it is not the romantic history of his wonderful rise, from the condition of a prisoner and a slave, to be the greatest potentate in Egypt, next to Pharaoh himself, that impresses you most as you gaze at the lonely tomb, but the thought of his unswerving devotion to the pure religion of his fathers, of his unflinching trust in the Covenant promises of the God of Israel. That humble cenotaph seems to you one of the grandest monuments of faith in the world. It remains to our day, like the cave of Machpelah under the mosque at Hebron,

in which Joseph's fathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob lie, to witness to the truth of Bible history.

In the great golden chapter of the text, in which the writer calls up the noblest names of Hebrew history, to strengthen the attachment of his Jewish brethren to the Christian faith which they had embraced, he conclusively proves to them that the link which connects all those names in different ages and circumstances, is the faith which they exhibited. This was their chief personal distinction and their common characteristic. It was their faith that gave a unity to the whole of their national history, and joined together the saints of the old with the saints of the new dispensation. It was not the mode of their religious worship, which might vary with their circumstances and with their advancement and enlightenment, but their firm and steadfast trust in God, that made them one. And in order to encourage the Jewish Christians to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, and not to cast away their confidence, but wait patiently for the fulfilment of the Divine promise, he brings before them, among many other examples of men who had clung to their hope in the most desperate circumstances, the example of Joseph, who, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Joseph, in spite of the supreme eminence to which he had attained in Egypt, and in spite of the many

ties of affection and interest which bound him to that land, never considered it his true home. He had always the heart of an exile in the Nile valley. His affections were fixed upon the country promised to his fathers. He knew that it should one day be the inheritance of his race, and that in it they should fulfil the high purposes of their election by Heaven. And though he was dying in Egypt, without having the privilege of revisiting what had been the home of his early years, he was sure that God was keeping it for the possession of his descendants ; and therefore he wanted his family and people to carry up his remains with them, when they should leave the land of their exile and settle in their own land, and bury them there. Years before that, he stood beside his father Jacob's deathbed, and was made to promise that he would not leave the body of the aged worn-out pilgrim in the country of his temporary sojourn, but would carry it up to the sepulchre of his fathers. And the example of his father's steadfastness and conviction of the truth of God's promises must have greatly strengthened his own faith. And when his own turn came to die he remembered his father's pious petition, and showed equal devotion himself. He knew that there must be endless difficulties in the way, that a long time must elapse ere his wishes could be carried out. But his faith triumphed over them all. He saw, after all, the end of his faith, the fulfilment of his hope in the final resting of his

bones under the shadow of Mount Ebal, amid the scenes he was familiar with as a boy.

And what a wonderful faith it was! It had proved equal to any strain put upon it. His knowledge of God at such an early time, without the revelation of Jesus Christ, must necessarily have been limited, but he trusted in Him with his whole soul. The spiritual powers by which his Divine life was sustained were comparatively feeble, but he cherished and cultivated them to the utmost of his ability. The great promise on which his heart rested could only be fulfilled after the interval of ages, but in his patience he possessed his soul. He had nothing in actual possession; but the hope that maketh not ashamed filled and animated his whole being.

And if his own faith in making such a dying request to his people was wonderful, equally wonderful must have been their faith in carrying it out. The funeral of Jacob was the grandest of which we have any record in the Bible, when the splendid chariots of the Egyptians escorted the great procession of Hebrew mourners to the border of Canaan, and the wailing that arose at the threshing-floor of Atad filled the Canaanites who looked on the unwonted spectacle with astonishment, so that they called the place where the great assembly was gathered Abel Mizraim, the Meadow of the Lamentations of the Egyptians. But it did not require so much faith to carry out this great funeral

as it required to carry out the funeral of Joseph. At the time of Jacob's death Joseph was at the zenith of his power. His people were favoured by the reigning monarch, and put in possession of the richest tract of the land. They wielded more political influence than any other class in Egypt. Joseph was at the head of affairs, and had the means to fulfil, without any difficulty, his father's wish to be laid in the family tomb at Hebron. The way was open throughout the whole territory of Egypt, and across the desert ; and the great retinue of troops and chariots that accompanied him, made it perfectly easy and safe for him to cross the boundaries of the Holy Land and pass on to the cave of Machpelah. It was a triumphal progress all the way.

But widely different were the circumstances in the case of Joseph, when his appointed time came. He knew, indeed, like his father, that the future of the world was to be with his people. He knew that the race of slaves was to become a great nation, that they one day would be brought out of Egypt, and be settled in the land promised to them. He believed in God's word ; he knew that in His own good time He would fulfil that word. And he wished himself to have a share in this future glory ; he wished to have his grave with his kindred. He would not accept a splendid Egyptian funeral or interment. He requested to be laid in the parcel of

ground which his father bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem. But the times were not propitious. Joseph's last days were disturbed by wars and rumours of wars, caused by the rebellion of the king of Upper Egypt—a descendant of the royal native race who ruled the whole land of Egypt before the foreign invasion of the Shepherd Kings, under whom Joseph served. And after his death war broke out, which, after lasting eighty years, ended in the expulsion of the foreign race and the reunion of the whole of Egypt under one king. Another royal dynasty arose that knew not Joseph. His great services were forgotten; his name and memory passed into oblivion. The new rulers were suspicious of the Hebrews, allied in race as they were with the old foreign conquerors. They therefore kept them under by all kinds of persecution and annoyance, compelling them to work in the clay-pits and make bricks for their cities and monuments—the meanest and most degrading form of servitude.

How, in such entirely altered circumstances, were the dying wishes of Joseph to be fulfilled? They embalmed his dead body after the manner of the Egyptians, as they had done to his father Jacob. They put him in a painted coffin in Egypt. But they could not take him out of the land, as was done in the case of his father. His body could not be honoured with a State funeral to Canaan, with a

great retinue of Egyptian guards accompanying it. The way was no longer open. The frontier was fortified and guarded by strong castles. A hostile army occupied the road through the desert to Canaan. In these circumstances they had to hastily bury the body of Joseph in any sepulchre that lay ready to hand. There is an old tradition that the body of Joseph was first interred at Pi-Beseth in the Fayoum, where some of the oldest tombs have recently been discovered, as also the remains of the Labyrinth, one of the wonders of the ancient world.

In some such temporary resting-place the embalmed body of the great Statesman lay for upwards of four hundred years. His own generation had all passed away, and several new generations arose. Several dynasties of the royal house reigned and disappeared. The greatest of the Pharaohs, Seti, Rameses, Thothmes, Menephtah, occupied the throne of Egypt. And still the persecution of the Hebrew slaves went on, till the memorable night when, amid the wild wailing of the whole Egyptian land for the death of the firstborn in every home, the Israelites began their great historical march out of the land of Egypt into national independence. Amid all the changes of the centuries, the promise made to their great national hero was not forgotten. Hastily exhuming the honoured remains from their hiding-place, they carried them along with them in their

flight. And, of all the possessions and spoils of the Egyptians which the Israelites triumphantly took away with them, none were so precious or so important as the coffin which contained the embalmed body of their great hero and father. They brought it carefully with them through the Red Sea, and on to the foot of Sinai; and, when the tabernacle was constructed, it journeyed with them in all their wanderings through the wilderness. For forty years it was borne on staves by men appointed for the purpose, side by side with the ark of God. The ark was the token of God's presence with them; and the coffin of Joseph was the silent but most expressive witness to them of faith in God and in His promises. How strange a sight this venerable relic must have been! What wonderful memories and associations it would recall! Joseph was dead for centuries; but he was with his brethren still in the flesh, and he, being dead, yet spoke to them encouragingly, amid all their difficulties and troubles, of his hope in God and the assurance he had that He would faithfully bring them at last to the land which He had promised to give them.

Joshua, their great leader under Moses, and then their sole leader after the death of Moses, must have had a foremost hand in this extraordinary funeral. Joseph was the father of his tribe, for Joshua belonged to the tribe of Ephraim; and the descendant would have a veneration far above all others for the

relics of his chief. He it was, probably, who remembered the dying wish of the Patriarch, who had the same promise handed down to him from father and son, who instigated Moses to make the necessary arrangements for fulfilling that promise, and who saw, in all the wanderings of the wilderness, that the precious burden was duly borne forth in the foremost place in the march day by day. Faithful to the trust committed to him, as was Lord Douglas to the charge of the silver heart of the Bruce, which he was carrying to the Holy Land for interment there, Joshua endured seeing Him who is invisible; while one by one the vast multitude, that came out from Egypt with him, melted away in their sin and unbelief, and perished, and he and Caleb were the only ones left of the old generation to cross over with the new generation and enter into the Land of Promise. And when at last, all dangers over, all foes conquered, the heritage of the land lay before him parcelled out among its lawful owners, he marched to the territory assigned to his own tribe—and there he demitted his charge. In the old patrimonial acres, the first earnest of the whole inheritance of the land, under the vast echoes of the blessings and curses from the rocky sides of Ebal and Gerizim, they laid the bones of the old Patriarch, wrapt in their Egyptian spicery, in the lonely sepulchre. Never was there a funeral like that, the funeral of a man who had lain more than

four hundred years in an Egyptian tomb, and was afterwards carried for forty years all through the Sinaitic Wilderness, and was finally buried, not far from where he was born, by a vast assemblage of his own descendants, each a blood relation. It was like the funeral of the mighty Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty, Thothmes, Rameses, Seti, etc., whose remains were lately discovered in such a wonderful manner near Thebes, and sent down in barges to the Museum of Boulak at Cairo, accompanied, as in the old manner, by the wild mournings and lamentations of the natives on both sides of the river.

We are reminded by it of another remarkable funeral that happened in our own day. We have all heard of the extraordinary devotion of Dr. Livingstone's black servants Chuma and Susi, who carried his remains from the heart of Africa—where he died on his knees alone, praying for the deliverance of the Dark Continent from the misery of slavery—as far as Zanzibar on the Eastern Coast. Africans have an intense horror of dead bodies, and it is almost impossible to get them to carry a dead body to the grave, lest they should be haunted by its ghost. But these heroic servants of Livingstone overcame this horror, and carried day by day and week by week, for nine long months, amid the greatest hardships and privations, the dead body of their beloved master to the shore of the great ocean.

They were under no small temptation to bury the corpse where he died ; and the superstitious terrors of the various tribes they encountered, placed endless difficulties in their way ; but they never wavered in their faithfulness and devotion till they had consigned the precious relics to the care of white friends on board ship, by whom they were taken to be laid to rest in the consecrated soil of Westminster Abbey, amid a nation's tears. That was most wonderful devotion ; and it enables us to realise in some measure the unparalleled devotion of the descendants of Joseph, in carrying his remains from the Fayoum in Egypt to the foot of Ebal in Canaan, in a funeral that lasted more than forty years. No wonder that the ground around the tomb of Joseph, with such a history belonging it, should have become the first national burying-place, superseding even the cave of Machpelah itself. No wonder that the race of those who were faithful to a dying promise, made to their great ancestor five hundred years previously, through all their wanderings and vicissitudes, should stand, through their victorious leader, foremost among all the tribes of Israel, and retain their supremacy to a late period in their nation's history.

But it is not of the faithfulness and devotion of the Israelites, who carried the body of Joseph in all their wanderings, that the sacred writer speaks, wonderful as it was, but of the faith of Joseph him-

self. That was even a more wonderful thing. He believed when belief was most difficult; he hoped when hope seemed most hopeless; he trusted when the evidence was smallest. He had full confidence in God's word, and therefore he gave commandment that his bones should rest in the land which God had promised should be the heritage of his race. And the sacred writer long afterwards held forth this wonderful example of faith, severely tested and tried, to the wavering Hebrew converts to Christianity, who were tempted, because of the difficulties and trials they encountered, to give up their new belief, and go back to their old religion of types and shadows that had all been fulfilled and done away with. Let them imitate the example of their great ancestor, and win his reward. He saw the day of Christ far off, and was glad; they lived in that day, let not its light be darkness to them. One weary century after another, the patriarchs and prophets would see the salvation of God. That salvation had come to them; let them rejoice fully in it. What was an unfulfilled promise to Joseph, was a bright reality to them; what to their forefathers was a matter of faith, was to them a blessed experience. Let them cling then to their glorious faith, which was indeed the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and be followers of those who through faith and patience were inheriting the promises.

And that is the lesson which we, too, have to learn from this wonderful burial of Joseph. It is not to embalm the memory of a dead saint that we are called, but to believe in and follow a living Saviour, who is with us always even to the end of the world. He has given us exceeding great and precious promises. He has begotten us again, by His own resurrection, from that other new tomb of Joseph at Calvary, unto a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, of which the earthly Canaan was but a dim shadow. Let us rely to our dying day upon that hope which maketh not ashamed, as Joseph relied, to his parting breath, upon the promise of the earthly inheritance. Let us seek the help of God's Spirit to enable us to live a life of faith, and to purify ourselves till we become worthy of the inheritance. And then, pilgrims and sojourners on earth as we are, for a longer or shorter period of years, as God shall determine, "our hearts like muffled drums," as the poet says, "beating a funeral march to the grave," we shall carry with us, in the great procession that is passing from earth to heaven, not a vile body that shall perish in the dust, but a body redeemed by the Lord, and fashioned by the Spirit after the pattern of our Lord, that shall dwell in honour and glory in the everlasting land.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE
LIFE

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die.”—JOHN xi. 25, 26.

THESE words were spoken by Jesus in the presence of death. Shortly before, Martha and Mary had sent to Him in His retreat beyond Jordan the touching message : “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” They had made no request. In their simple trust they had thought that the mere expression of their need would bring Jesus to their aid. But Jesus, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, “abode two days still in the same place where He was.” It was from no want of sympathy that He did so ; but He must await the moment of His Father’s will. Knowing as He did how the sickness of Lazarus would end, He yet knew that its final issue would be for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

It was, moreover, to accomplish this that at length He summoned the disciples to accompany Him to Judæa. They were not at first willing to

go. The perils through which their Master had lately passed were still fresh in their minds. But all their objections were overruled, on the ground that he who followed the intimations of God's will and walked in the path pointed out to him by God, stumbled not, for he was walking in the light. And as thus Jesus indicated the principle by which His movements were directed, He pointed forward also to the work He was about to accomplish: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." These words the disciples understood in their literal sense, and it needed the express declaration of their Master to bring home to their minds the fact that Lazarus was dead. The thought that Jesus was about to raise him does not seem to have occurred to them; but, seeing that He was resolved to return to Judæa, their mingled feelings of fervent love to Him, and of despair regarding the future of His cause, found expression in the words of Thomas: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

It is not difficult to imagine the feelings that had meanwhile been passing in the hearts of the two sisters in their quiet home at Bethany. Doubtless, after their first sending of the message, they had looked for the speedy arrival of Jesus; but when He did not come, and their brother grew worse, and was at length taken from them, to their passionate grief would be added this, the most

bitter thought of all, that if Jesus had only been there, they might have been spared this great sorrow. When, accordingly, word was brought to Martha that at length Jesus was approaching the village, and she went forth to meet Him, it was to this feeling that she at once gave expression: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Not that she wished to convey any reproach. She was but uttering the thought that there was in Jesus a power to help, which in this instance had come too late. "But"—even as she uttered the words, a deeper hope took possession of her—might it be that Jesus could still do something? She knew not what. She knew only that He was all-powerful and all-loving. "But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." Her vague hope Jesus met with an answer purposely vague. He wished to draw out her faith, and to make clear and definite what was as yet only a longing in her heart. "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha said unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." The moment of her greatest need Jesus seized for the highest revelation of Himself. He had comfort for her in her sorrow. He had help for her now. "Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

We cannot follow in detail the rest of the wonderful scene. It is familiar to all. Enough that Jesus gave to Martha practical evidence of the truth of His words by the miracle with which He accompanied them; and that He who had brought back to life Jairus' daughter when "even now dead," and who had restored to the widowed mother the son whose body she was following to the grave, gave still higher and more convincing proof of His power, by raising him who had been already four days dead, and whose body had actually been laid in the tomb.

Such, then, are the historical circumstances of our text. Before we pass to consider the practical lessons it may so well teach us, let us notice two general truths it clearly conveys. They are expressed in the first two words of the sublime declaration. "I am," said Jesus, "the Resurrection, and the Life." "I"—Martha, when first she had addressed Jesus, had looked upon Him as the channel through which help might come, rather than as the source itself of help. But Jesus emphatically gathered up into His own Person the blessing He was about to bestow. And as before He had announced Himself to be the Bread of life, and the Water of life, and the Light of the world, so now He pierced the darkness that lay beyond the grave, and proclaimed that He was the Resurrection and the Life.

It was this investing by Jesus of His words with a personal character which gave to them a new meaning and force. Before His time there had been in many a heathen religion earnest searchings and gropings after immortality. Men, left even to the light of nature, had felt that this world was not enough, and that they must try to offer some explanation of the mystery of death. They had soothed its horrors with soft expressions. They had pointed forward to a future state of existence, shadowy it is true, and unreal, but still one where the spirits of men might live when they quitted this mortal flesh. But, after all, their best anticipations were but guesses. There was no certainty, no definiteness, about them. They had no proof to offer of the truths they were yet so fain to believe.

Nor were the Jews much better. There does, indeed, run through the Old Testament the belief in another state of existence, but even it seems engulfed at times in the mysteries with which it is surrounded. "For in death," says the Psalmist, "there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" (Ps. vi. 5). "If a man die," asks Job in his perplexity, "shall he live *again*?" (Job xiv. 14).

But in the declaration of Jesus there is no vagueness, no uncertainty. With all its simplicity, it is still the most comprehensive and far-reaching

statement which men had yet received, that this life does not end all, that there is another and higher life than a merely physical one, and that those who believe in Jesus are already sharing in it.

For—and this is the second truth to which I wish to refer—Jesus does not hold out this risen life as a far-away promise of what is to come to men after death. Martha herself had already acknowledged that she knew that such a life was awaiting her brother. But He offers it now. “I am”—not “I shall be,” but “I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

What Jesus teaches is that, for a true believer, death can hardly be said to have any real existence. It is but a chance, a momentary jar in the chain of being. It is not so much the end of one life that a new one may be entered on hereafter, as the door through which the already spiritually - risen man passes to enjoy in its fulness the life beyond. I know that to some this may sound very mystical and unintelligible. And yet it should not be so very hard for us to grasp the truth that, as believers in Christ, we are already sharers in another than a merely physical life, and that for us the life eternal is even now begun. “Every true believer,” it has

been finely said,¹ "is in reality and for ever sheltered from death. To die in full light, in the serene brightness of the life which is in Jesus, and to continue to live in Him, is no longer that which human language designates by the name of death. It is as if Jesus said: In Me he who is dead is sure of life, and he who lives is sure never to die."

Three very practical lessons we may learn from the truths we have been considering.

I

We are bid no longer to fear death.

Left to himself, man cannot but dread the hour of dying. The leaving all that is known and loved here—the solitary departure one knows not whither—the dissolution of the body: who does not shrink from thoughts such as these? Not that there have not been men who, with no belief in immortality, have yet cheerfully welcomed death as the release from this world's troubles, or who, abandoning the hope in a personal hereafter, have been content to live in the memory of good deeds left behind. But, after all, how is it with the majority of men and women? Could you willingly embrace death, if you believed it to be the end of all? Could you, sorrowfully it must ever be, yet hopefully, surrender to Him those dearest to you, if you were

¹ By Godet.

unable to look forward to meeting again in another world?

We cannot, indeed, expect—it would be unnatural to do so—that belief in Christ will at once take away all fear of death; but who does not feel that it casts over its terrors a new and soothing light? The dark valley still lies before us, but there is light upon the path. The stormy river must still be crossed, and the waters are often very swift and deep, but we have at least the assurance: “When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee” (Isa. xliii. 2).

Think of death in the light of truths such as these, and what a difference it makes! And if we remember, besides, what I have already tried to indicate, that death to the true believer is but the opening of the door to the Father’s home beyond, have we not cause for thankfulness and hope?

You have seen the little bird in its cage beating against the bars, struggling hard for freedom, and you have seen the same bird perhaps, when an open door has been found, eagerly darting forth to regain the liberty it had lost. Even so with Christ’s people. Here they are imprisoned, confined. When death comes, it comes to them as a release from the things of sense and time. They seek a heavenly, an abiding country.

“How old are you?” a little German boy once asked Dean Stanley. “Sixty,” was the answer. “Why,” said the child, “all your life is over.” “No,”

was the answer, "the best time is yet to come." And no one who has read the life or writings of another great teacher of the English Church, Charles Kingsley, can forget how he longed for death, "beautiful, wise, kind death," to come and tell him all he longed to know. It was in the light of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life that these and such as these could thus welcome death. It is only by a living trust in the same living Lord that we, too, with the great Apostle, can exclaim: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 55, 57, R.V.).

II

We learn not to sorrow too much for departed friends.

They are not dead, but gone before. Their bodies may rest in the grave, but their spirits have returned to God who gave them. Christ is not with us, as He was with the sisters at Bethany, to restore to our sight those whom death has taken from us; but for us His promise is certain, that those who are in Him are not dead but alive.

Has that promise no comfort for you who are mourning? Sorrow you must. The ties so closely formed upon earth cannot be broken without a pang. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow

not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 13, 14).

The great truth of the Resurrection, Christ's living testimony to His words, tells us of the new life in which our loved ones already share. It is little, indeed, that we know of that life—impossible for us to picture to ourselves the state or the occupations of those who have already entered upon it. Over the future God has cast a veil, which it is not for us in our curiosity to try to raise. Of this only we may be sure, that those who sought communion with Jesus upon earth are enjoying still higher communion now. They have left behind them all that was dark and wearisome and sorrowful. For them have been prepared some of the "many mansions" in the Father's House—many in view of the numbers that shall claim them, many in respect of the different capabilities and needs of each.

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. xxi. 3, 4).

III

We have a solemn warning to prepare even now for the future that awaits us.

There is no fact more certain than the fact of death: no law which more surely embraces all men within its scope than—"It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. ix. 27). And how we shall meet death when it comes, and what shall be in store for us hereafter, depend upon our lives and conduct now. It is to those who believe in Him that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life; it is for those who are earnestly seeking them now that the "many mansions" are prepared. It was the first work of the old Egyptian kings on being appointed to rule to begin to build their tombs. In a higher sense shall we not follow their example, knowing "that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens"? (2 Cor. v. 1, R.V.).

Let us lift up our thoughts above all that is merely worldly and selfish. Let us, as already risen with Christ, "seek those things which are above." Let us draw ever nearer to Christ Himself, and strive to make our lives liker to His life. And then, when death does come, we shall welcome it with joy, not turn from it with fear. We shall be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 17).

THE INVISIBLE WITNESSES AND
SHARERS OF OUR CONFLICT

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE INVISIBLE WITNESSES AND SHARERS OF OUR CONFLICT

“That they without us should not be made perfect.”—
HEB. xi. 40.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so
great a cloud of witnesses . . . let us run the race with
patience.”—HEB. xii. 1.

THERE are truths here which it needs a bold hand to touch. There are mysteries half revealed just peeping through the veil which we get a glimpse of, but cannot follow to a fuller knowledge. The struggling saint on earth and the glorious invisible host in heaven are here brought close together, grouped in one picture; and we can almost fancy that with the din of the mortal conflict there is interwoven the sweeter music of unseen choirs. The main thought is expressed in a figure borrowed not from heavenly scenes, but from the coarser struggles of the world. The writer has in view the pagan racecourse, with the naked athletes panting and straining towards the goal, and the assembled thousands cheering their favourite runner, or waiting in hushed suspense as the climax nears and the last

spurt decides the winner. He seizes on this with the same pure, fearless hand with which the Divine Master turned all common things into symbols of the spiritual and Divine, and he makes it do service in stimulating the faint-hearted Hebrew Christians. They are the runners; the world of temptation and trial is the arena; the prize is all that God has promised to His saints; the spectators of the race are all the departed heroes and martyrs of faith. And here is the point where we touch on mystery, and have to speak with timid if not bated breath. For all those great and earnest souls whose story is told in the eleventh chapter, and who died in faith, are represented here as still in touch with the present, living, contending Christian host; profoundly interested in their endeavours, cheering them with silent approval, waiting for the victory of those who are running now, because it will complete their own. For though they died in faith, as the writer says, and have won their reward and crown, they died unsatisfied, and are still unsatisfied until the great struggle of faith shall be brought to a completion, and all who have run the race shall be crowned, and all God's promises fulfilled, "that they without us should not attain the consummation." Now, from all this we get some dim visions of the heavenly life, and some mighty incentives for the earthly struggle.

I

We are told of the silent, invisible host who survey the conflicts and endeavours of the faithful.

We are compassed about by a cloud of watchful and sympathetic witnesses. It is not merely that we are surrounded by sacred memories, inspiring traditions, heroic examples, but by presences more real and vividly alive. This writer unquestionably believed that the faithful departed are not removed from us by some immeasurable stretch of space in some vague and distant heaven, but that they are near to us in a way of which our dull perceptions give no proof. The separation is more on our side than theirs. We are seen of them though we behold them not, because the veil of flesh hangs dark between. We are running our Christian race and playing our Christian part, however unobserved and lonely we think ourselves, under the eyes of an imposing assembly, before an exalted and innumerable audience. In the Church of the first centuries this thought took deep hold on the Christian mind, and served as a mighty stimulus to Christian endeavour. The saints felt that though unknown they were well known, for the little stage on which they played their part had all heaven for its theatre. They heard the flutter of angels' wings about their path, and saw the glorified watching with earnest eyes their endeavours. Tertullian only expressed

the general belief when he wrote: "O blessed ones, you are passing through a noble struggle, in which the living God acts the part of superintendent, in which saints and angels are spectators, in which the Holy Ghost is your trainer, in which the prize is an eternal crown, and glory everlasting." And this same thought is woven into every part of the present chapter. The writer tells us that there are close uniting bonds between the Church above and the Church below. We are come—not we are coming—unto the general assembly and Church of the first-born, who are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. There is but one great army of the living God—the host in front, who have gained the restful heights; and the host in the rear, still pressing and contending towards the mark. And those before are not forgetful or unobservant of those behind. "They do not lose their mortal sympathies, or change to us although they change." They are near us in our mortal struggles. We are compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses.

II

We are told that not only are these departed ones spectators of our conflict, but they are profoundly and earnestly interested in it.

It is helping to fulfil their desires. The consummation of their hopes and joys depends upon it. There is something wanting in their satisfaction,

which can only be supplied by the continuance of the work and warfare of faith and its final victory. Without us, says the apostle, in strange words which have puzzled many a reader,—without us they are not made perfect. We have often fancied that our sainted dead are shut up in a sort of epicurean heaven, where they feast at royal banquets and bask on sunny meadows, and where their main happiness consists in entire separation from and forgetfulness of the strife and struggles and tearful sympathies which they left below. But that is no better than a pagan notion. If you think they cannot be happy unless they are entirely hidden away from the sins and sorrows of earth, how can you believe that God is blessed, and that Christ has fulness of joy, though they know all the pains and woes of the weary world? Whatever the blessedness of the saints may be, it is not a blessedness of blind forgetting and stifled sympathies. You know little of joy if you do not understand the joy which can have tears in its eyes. And we are expressly told, indeed, that there are tears in heaven; for does not God Almighty wipe the tears from every eye? Without us they are not made perfect. How can it be otherwise? If the departed still live—and are the same persons, and not entirely different persons—they must retain the bulk of their earthly thoughts, affections, and sympathies. If they do not, there is no real continued existence at all. It would

be the creation of another being. They must be interested still in all the best things which engaged them below. The martyr who suffered for the Church's sake still bears the Church on his heart. The saint who spent his life in furtherance of righteousness is still urgent about the same good fight. The mother who prayed for her erring child has not ceased to think of that child, and surely not ceased to pray now that she beholds the face of Him who came to save the lost. Those who did any Christian work, and left it unfinished, have surely some sympathetic thoughts for the workers who are still carrying it on; and those who have loved long and constantly, and left their loved ones behind, cannot be quite content until they see each other face to face again. No; death is not a Lethean stream in which all the past is forgotten, nor is the sympathetic heart frozen into an emotionless iceberg as it passes from sphere to sphere. Still do hearts beat with the old affections. Still is their old abode dear to them, and all its highest interests and labours. We are compassed about by a great cloud of earnest witnesses.

III

We are all, by the Christian part we play, helping to fulfil the joy of the saints that have gone before.

And the fulfilment of our own perfect joy depends upon the efforts of those who come after. Without

us they are not made perfect. All who have fought the fight of faith had one great end in view. It was not simply their own personal victory, their own attainment of heavenly rest—it was a far more comprehensive and Godlike aim; they looked forward to the time when the earth would be renewed in holiness, when righteousness would spring forth everywhere as the grass, when the longed-for Messiah would establish His rule in all hearts, and God's sweet saving will would be universally done. For that they laboured; to bring that nearer, all their efforts and righteous sufferings were done and endured. And they died with the promises unfulfilled, with their hopes only very partially, very scantily, realised. To us they have bequeathed the work which they did, and the grander duty of carrying it on to that consummation for which they looked; and they are watching us, and waiting to see us bring it nearer. Each generation of faithful men can only do its little part. Enough if the blessed time is brought one step nearer. Each generation dies in faith, holding on to the promises; yet with the pain of dissatisfaction in its heart, because so little has been won, and so much remains to be won. And each generation says to the next, We depend upon you to crown our efforts, to bring about the answer to our prayers, and to help forward the attainment of our lifelong desires. Without you we cannot be made perfect. No; all

of us who are engaged in the Christian warfare to-day are not only working for ourselves and for the world, but we are doing what the saints of old with aching hearts were obliged to leave undone. Each movement that the world makes onward to the perfect day adds something to their satisfaction as they behold the struggle. Push it forward, they say to us. Do your part as we did ours. Be brave, be earnest, be true; fret not because you cannot do all you would; desist not because the better time comes so slowly. Every advance you make is so much gain to us—so much gain to those who come after you, and who will have to carry it on still further. The fight is one, and all who are, or have been, or shall be, engaged in it are one. There can be no perfect satisfaction for any until there is victory for all. You are fulfilling the desires of all the saints by your service of to-day. And we watch the perpetual warfare as if we were in it now; it is ours as much as yours. Yes, we are compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses.

IV

Lastly, we are exhorted to find inspiration in the memories of the past, and to follow the example of the noble dead.

A cloud of witnesses is about us, says the apostle, not spectators merely, but martyrs—that is the literal word. Martyrs—men and women who en-

dured all things, who braved all things, who overcame all things in their steadfast witness for God, in their resolute determination to get His will done, and to establish righteousness and truth in the earth; men who suffered much injustice, but never did it; men who lost all things rather than lose their hold on goodness; men who walked with clean hearts through the world's corruption, who saved the world in its darkest days from falling utterly into perdition; men who kept the light burning; men whose faith made them mighty. We are, indeed, compassed about by them. Their names are written on every page of history. We can hardly take up a book worth reading which does not refer to them. The world never forgets them. They are the only names which the world treasures; though a thousand years old and more, they are still fresh and sweet. Their influence is all about us; we breathe their thoughts; they rule our spirits when we think we are self-ruled; they make us prouder of our common humanity. All good men live in the world for ever. Their good deeds never die. Their saintliness remains a perfume in the air; it gives health to our bones, and elevation to our purposes. Brethren, you are compassed about by them; do not forget it; try to catch something of their spirit. They have lived in vain, so far as you are concerned, if they do not make you better men and women. Think of them often, how their path

was as rugged as the most rugged of yours, and more so. Think what foes they wrestled with, what conflicts in the darkness, what terrible temptations. Think of their loneliness and heartache and heart-break; their sorrows, bereavements, despondencies, and fears; and how their faith kept them true, saved them from falling, and made them more than conquerors. Think of them, and pray that you may have their faith and courage, and be in a measure like them. Life is not worth living unless we live, as they did, for higher things than self. Try to get into fellowship this morning with all the good and true men who have helped to glorify the earth, and ask that your feet day by day as they walk through life's path may leave some of the shining marks which their feet left. Being dead, they yet speak to you; they are not far away; they are near enough to touch your hearts and lips with their own sacred fire. "We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses."

A SERMON OF REFLECTION

BY REV. T. RHONDDA WILLIAMS

A SERMON OF REFLECTION

"As ye go, preach."—MATT. x. 7.

THE phrase I have taken as a text was brought to my mind recently in somewhat new and striking light. An aged mother of my congregation, two days before her death, was asked by her daughter, "Have you anything special to say to us, mother?"

"No," was the answer. "No, I have said it all as I went along." In other words, she had fulfilled this direction: "As ye go, preach"; deliver your message as you go along.

These words were spoken by Jesus to men specially set apart to preach. But it is wise counsel to all. Every life has a message to deliver. Can we all believe that, to begin with? How such a conviction would invest life with dignity and importance! And it is not too much for the humblest life.

If physical science has taught us anything, it is that the apparently insignificant is not insignificant; that the smallest, meanest thing that grows plays a

vital part in the economy of nature. Diderot said, "To make one blade of grass grow, all nature must co-operate." The life of the distant star is surely very remote from the little blade of grass that hides itself in the valley—yes, remote, but yet vitally related to it. Science will have no absolute separations. In the vast system of creation, that blade has its place to occupy and its contribution to make.

So, too, in the world of moral and spiritual forces. No life is without purpose and mission. Whatever your place in society, however obscure your lot, remember there is a distinct place for *you* in the vast spiritual economy of God.

I emphasise this, because it is so difficult for many to realise it. You live, perhaps, in a two- or three-roomed house, and nearly all that you concern yourself about is there; it is difficult for you to realise that the immeasurable universe, the "eternities and immensities" which Carlyle spoke of, can have any regard to the life you live, or that your life can affect them. Moreover, you note how the great men die, and the world goes on as before. But the world is not the same as if they had never been. Bismarck has left an indelible mark on Germany, and Paul on Christendom. England is different because John Wesley preached here.

So of the great. Yes, and so also of the small in their own degree. If what I have said of Wesley

is true, what of the old man who told John Wesley, "Sir, you seek to serve God and go to heaven. Remember, you cannot serve Him alone. The Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion"? Those words never died out of Wesley's soul; they became the keynote of his life, and led him on to his great motto: "The world is my parish."

And what of the mother, who, when John at the age of six years had a wonderful escape from burning, regarded that as a call from God to take great care of his soul, and nurse him for Divine service? Have not the unnamed peasant and the humble mother their indispensable places? So it will be, if you descend the social scale to the most insignificant life, you will find that it relates itself to all that is great and important in the spiritual history of the world.

"Any road, this simple Entepfuhl road, will lead you to the end of the world," says Carlyle. It was this truth that made Paul say, "None of us liveth to himself." It was this great truth that made the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews encourage the weary runner in the Christian race to think that he was one of, and one with, multitudes that had gone before, and that they were all still regarding *him* with interest: "Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Let us have the conviction which Jesus had: "I must work the work

of Him that sent Me." Believe that God sent you ; sent you for a purpose ; sent you in possession of His own nature, a partaker in Divine things, for Divine service, and "As ye go, preach."

But if this be true of all, it is, I think, specially true of mothers. No message is of greater significance than, perhaps none so great as, the message of motherhood.

Surely the noblest women have not been the saints who have lived away from the world, but women who have lived *in* it, in its duties and sorrows, in its loves and fidelities. Of all the moral moulders and spiritual builders of society, mothers are the most important.

Not the least service which Christianity did for the world was this : that it set up the image and the conception of a holy mother nursing a holy child. There were connected with it what we now call superstition ; but far deeper and profounder than any superstition or false dogma was this truth : that motherhood is a sacred condition, and childhood a holy thing. It is little wonder that thousands of Roman mothers, when they looked up to the beautiful image of the Madonna and her Child, felt the stirrings of a nobler ideal of their trust, and saw further into the eternal depths of the tenderness and the sacredness of the relations they bore. Christianity has, indeed, helped to perfect the ideal of motherhood and of childhood. Those of you who

are now mourning the loss of mothers have this immense consolation: that those mothers regarded you as a very sacred trust, and did what they could to start your life on the right road. And of all the needs of this old world, perhaps its greatest is that of being *properly mothered*. And, whatever other work you mothers can do in society, take care that you do your mothering well.

Of all the blind suggestions which certain foolish forms of Socialism make, none is more blind than that the State should nurse the children, and set mothers free to earn their own living.

So mad have some people gone on the ideal of economic independence for women, that they would have children nursed in public institutions to secure it. The proposal is blind to the interests of the child, and more blind to the instincts of the mother. She needs the child, as the child needs her. There is such a thing, thank God, as the maternal heart—the heart that yearns after its offspring.

Most mothers would be like the mother of Moses in this: if the State adopted their children, they would want to be engaged as the nurses.

Or if this stupid proposal of certain Socialists were ever adopted, it would be overwhelmed with Jochebeds and Miriams—they would ruin it in twelve months.

The human heart will not be easily cheated of its prime desires. Motherhood is anchored in in-

instincts that will not be denied their due. We may thank God that it is so.

Indescribable are the mercy and wisdom of the arrangement by which we are born into a mother's care; that in life's helpless beginning we nestle on a heart that loves. Here, indeed, is a fountain of tenderness and devotion, from which we draw many of our best qualities; here is one of the outstanding evidences that "God is love." He who gave us to mother and father is Himself the Father and Mother of us all.

Indeed, in the simple lives which have now passed from our midst we can see what an important place a mother occupies in the most ordinary ranks of life, —what an immense responsibility is hers, what large service she renders the world when her work is well done.

Here were women whose names will only be known to a few, and only for a little time; who did not work in prominence, and who had no extraordinary gifts; but they "looked well to the ways of their household," and did not "eat the bread of idleness"—their children have risen up and called them "blessed"—the flowers of grateful memories will grow on their graves; and their good is preserved in the lives that follow them. Let them rest in peace; they did a good day's work, and as they went they preached.

In each case the children can learn from their

own mother the great lessons of unselfishness and self-denial in little things, the things that happen every day, of quiet unobtrusive devotion to duty, of neighbourly usefulness, of religion without great professions, and of piety and faith without many words. Few things were given them to do, but over those few things they were faithful—"Well done, good and faithful servants." Now it is our business to take such memories as a stimulus to a faithful life. When Russell Lowell thought of Dr. Channing dead, he wished that he too, when death came, might be found in such honourable service—

"When that day comes, O may this hand grow cold,
 Busy, like thine, for Freedom and the Right."

Let us all believe that we have a Divine work to do, a Divine message to deliver, and "As we go, preach"—"say it all as we go along." Two or three considerations show the wisdom of this counsel.

I

If you do not say it as you go along, you may never have it to say.

Live an indifferent life, and what you will have to say to the world at the end will probably be not worth hearing.

The great messages do not come to a man by any magic—they grow out of his life. The best

things are said by the best men. I know that there are a thousand facts that seem to contradict this—that men of indifferent morality have often written very good maxims, and that bad men often give good advices. This is quite true; but in such cases it is not *their* message—it is a message they have learnt, and of which they have no more than a theoretical possession. It is the truest men that see deepest into the heart of truth. And it is through fidelity to good and holy things you obtain a message for those around you. There are thousands who quite intend to be useful, to do good, to deliver a helpful message sometime, but they delay it one day after another; they have not really begun yet—they may never begin! Don't trust to finding your message when you come to die; find it now, and say it as you go along.

II

If you say it only at the last, it will not have the same force or permanence.

If you could find it in the darkening hours of declining day, and you yourself could be very earnest in delivering it, it would be greatly weakened by reason of your past. The world is not redeemed by deathbed testimonies—it is the life that tells. Your last word might be like a flash in the darkness, a wild light breaking the gloom

for a moment; but it would grow no flowers, sustain no life: for that, there is nothing like steady sunshine.

If, eighteen hundred years ago, a woman named Dorcas had lived a selfish life, and told women at her end to clothe the poor, it is not likely that any societies doing that work to-day would be called "Dorcas Societies"; but she *lived to do* it, delivered her message as she went along, and we are keeping her name alive.

Names, of course, do not often survive, even of the good, but the goodness itself never fails. Through life, and through the speech that represents life, that springs from it, throbs and palpitates with it, does inspiration come to the world.

A good life, however quiet and unseen, is an immortal thing. The sun sets, but the day's sunshine is not lost; Nature has locked it in her heart, and will thrive for having had it.

In the autumn you put some seeds in the earth. Since then the cold has been, and the snow and the storm; but the earth has been true to her trust, and now the first blossoms are out to greet the spring sun. Those simple women were God's seed-sowers. For those who received what they had to give, storms may indeed come, winters there are sure to be; but surely, too, a work that cannot die has been done, seed immortal sown.

Let us try to live that our lives may be to others an inspiring and regulative power.

If you have great gifts, use them faithfully ; if only few and small, use them just as faithfully. Without any exceptional endowments, into the common walks of life we may carry the sweetness and peace and pity of God. "Let your light shine,"—if not in the sky, where all men may see, then in the home, lighting all that are in the house.

III

Deliver your message as you go along, because you are constantly passing points to which you never return.

Life is lived in periods, and there is a message for every period which cannot be delivered in any other period.

If childhood has a message of its own, it is mainly the business of those who train the child to train it so that its message shall be delivered. Some parents think that it matters little how the children are trained, that they are just as likely to turn out well in after-life. That cannot be so ; but if it were so, the child's message is lost. There is a message of pleasure and joy, of freshness and naturalness, which can only be delivered in childhood, and to miss it is an enormous loss. In later life, the responsibility for the message rests on the man himself.

When you come to the choice of a profession or trade, how important it is for you to say the right word and to do the right thing. If you make a mistake, it is often very difficult to right it. And the issues may be most serious.

More serious still is it when you come to make your choice of a life-partner. If you are a parent, there is a message to be delivered to children at every stage as long as they are with you.

If you miss giving them what they need up to the age of ten, you can never give it later on.

Many parents give the devil too many years' start, and they never quite overtake his work.

Never was better counsel given us than this: "As ye go, preach"; don't pass a station in the hope of coming back to it. "Redeem the time," or, as Luther translates, "Buy up the opportunity"; an opportunity lost never precisely recurs.

This line of reflection has to most of us its gloomy side. We look back, and, oh, how many blunders we have made!

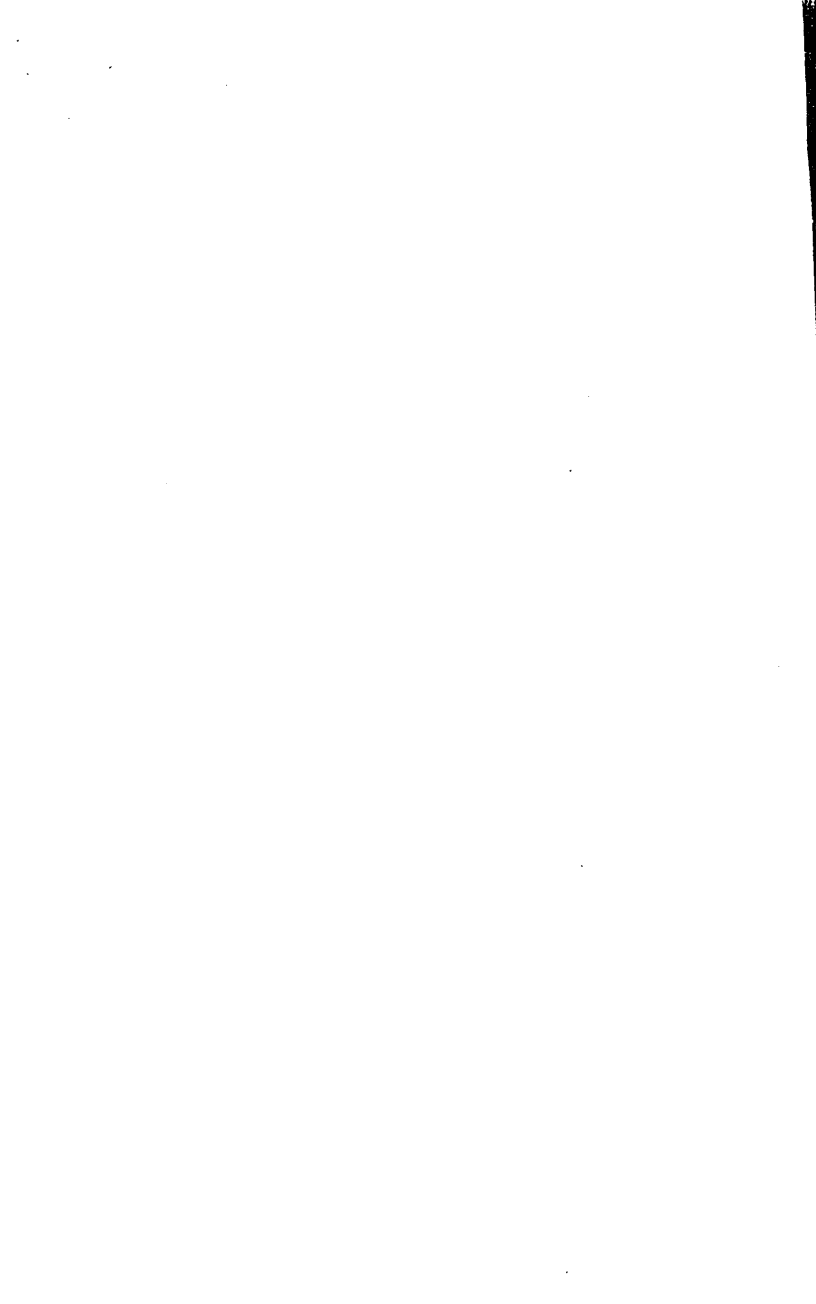
Well, go back we cannot; we cannot be now as if those mistakes had not been made. What then? Shall we despair? No; we must rise to a manly and brave life, to make the best of the present, and turn the future to good account. If *now* we have learnt a message, let us deliver it with fidelity.

And surely we have not come so far without learning something, and something of importance.

We have failed much ; but from failures, too, if we take them rightly, we may learn much—much of man and life and God.

Upon what we have learnt, let us live ; turn it into practical wisdom, and give the good of it to those about us.

THE END



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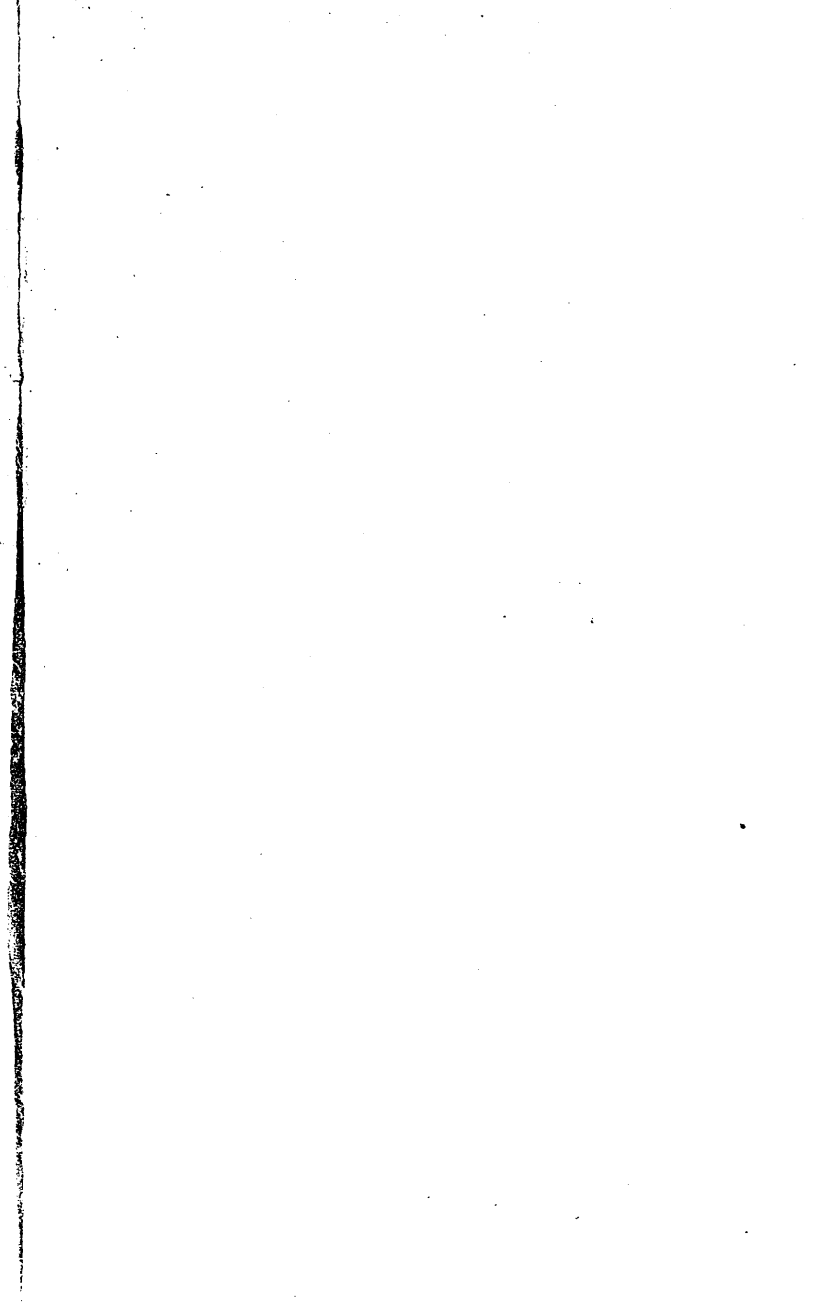
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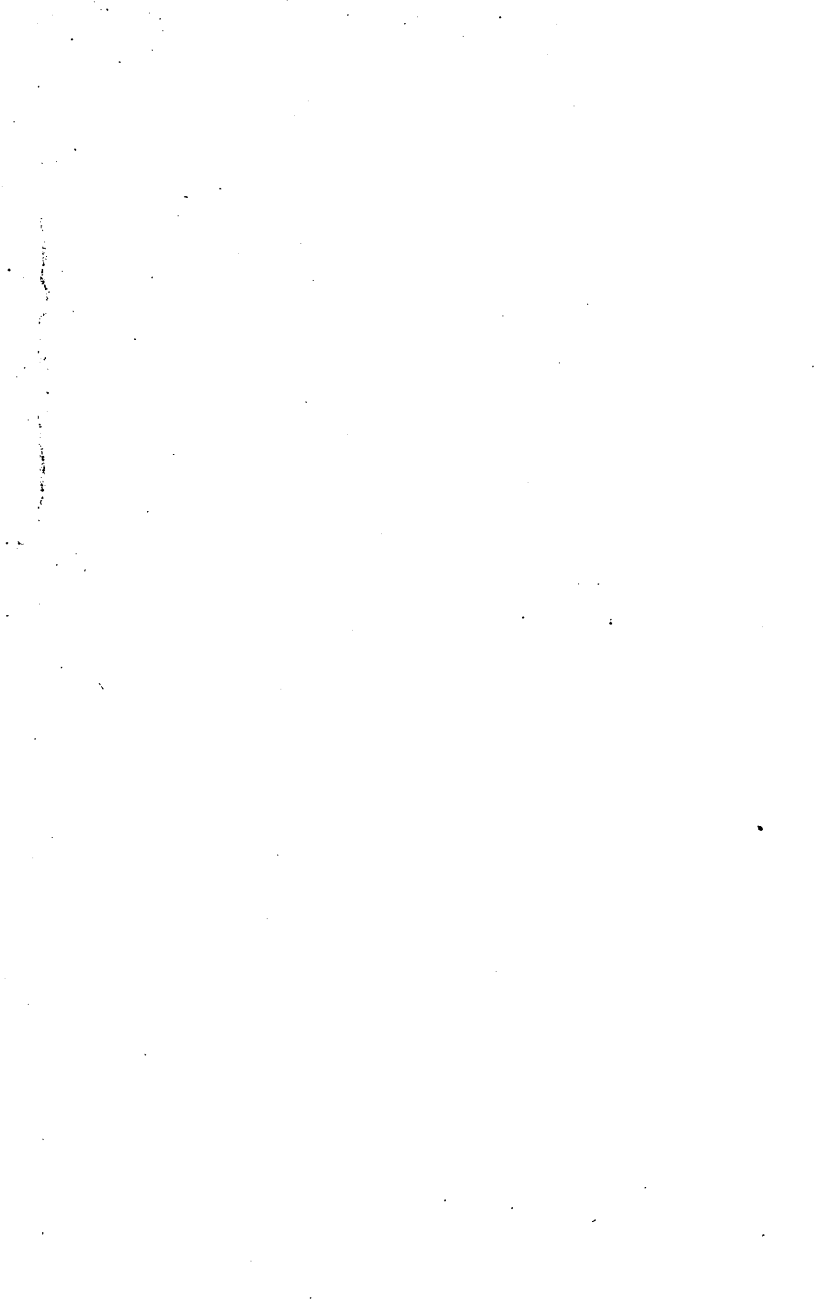
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